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## NOTES

**DORIS LESSING** recently completed a lecture series on the craft of writing at the New School for Social Research. She has written nineteen books; her new novel, **The Summer Before the Dark,** will be published by Knopf in May. . . . **EDWIN BROCK** is a former policeman and advertising man. His first book of poems, **Invisibility Is the Art of Survival,** was published last year by New Directions. . . . **COLIN FALCK,** an English poet and critic, edits **The Review.** . . . **LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI** is a Polish exile who teaches at All Souls College, Oxford, England. . . . **RAYMOND FEDERMAN's** story **"On Jazz"** is taken from a novel in progress entitled **Take It or Leave It.** . . . **SANFORD CHERNOFF** is a young writer living in New York. . . . **BARBARA ROSE** is working on a film documentary about American art. She is a contributing editor of **Artforum** and **The New York Times Magazine.** . . . **ALICIA OSTRIKER** is editing a book on Blake for Penguin and finishing her second volume of poems, **A Faithful Woman.** . . . **LEONARD MICHAELS** recently returned from a six month visit to France. . . . **MORRIS WEITZ**

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## NOTES

(*Continued from page 8*)

just received a Senior Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to work on **Concepts: Their History and Variety.** He holds the Richard Koret Chair in Philosophy and the History of Ideas at Brandeis University. . . . **NEIL SCHMITZ** is an associate professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He has written a number of articles on contemporary fiction and is in England this year "bringing a mysterious book to its surprising conclusion." . . . **W. W. ROBSON's** recent publications include **Critical Essays** and **The Signs Among Us** (Routledge) and **Modern English Literature** (Oxford University Press). . . . **JOYCE CAROL OATES** most recent book is a collection of short stories, **Marriages and Infidelities.** . . . **NANCY MILFORD** is working on a biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay. She writes for **Harper's** and **The New York Times** and is the mother of 2–10/11 children. . . . **THOMAS R. EDWARDS** has a Guggenheim this year. He's working on a book about Jane Austen.

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# POINTS AFTER . . .

## THE BEST AND THE BRAINIEST

I don't know the origins of the myth that the best and the brainiest were enlisted to preside over the fiasco of Vietnam. Obviously, some intelligent and sophisticated people acted as advisors to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. But most of the brain trust in both administrations were academic "experts," which meant that they were scholars or administrators who had never exhibited any range of political knowledge or speculation. And while they differed widely in their views, few of them had the kind of detached, critical mind one associates with the outstanding political figures of any time. So far as I know, no sharp and independent thinkers were ever consulted on any questions of foreign policy. In fact, it appeared that it was precisely this kind of thinking that was excluded from government circles; one simply assumed that the main qualifications of the government intellectuals were academic prestige and a second-rate mind.

Who were these bunglers who are still thought of as the best and the brainiest — not only by Halberstam — and why? Some, like the Rostows, were ideologists dressed up like hard-headed pragmatists. Some, like McNamara, had the kind of whiz-kid mind that is adulated by those who are afraid of thinking. Some were reputed to have "steel-trap" minds, which meant that they were incapable of examining their premises. Some were liberal professors. But what they all had in common was a style and a background that seemed to designate them as members of a ruling elite.

This country does not have an intellectual class brought up to fill the interstices of government, as does England, for example. But the closest thing to it here is that part of the academic and business community that is attracted to power: generally the Democrats draw on those from the more prestigious universities, those who think of themselves as liberals, as patricians who have signed up for humanity; while the Republicans recruit those businessmen who think they are thinking about the public interest, and the professors who pride themselves on being "realists" and immune to liberal illusions.

Aside from the question of competence, the truth is that neither group has a clear idea of national or class interest. The Republicans pretend at least to be single-minded but the Democrats are between two stools. Basically, opponents to the war in Vietnam fall into two camps: the radical idealists and those who simply think it was a mistake, militarily, economically, and politically. The Democratic intellectuals in residence at the White House were mostly not in the radical camp, and though they shared some of the feelings of the New Left they did not share its perspectives. Yet their contribution, in terms of the national interest, in the terms, that is, in which the government saw the problems of the country, was mainly to add self-deception to the general con-

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fusion. It is still not clear who concocted the anticommunist policy used to justify Vietnam, but even if we grant its political premises, it should have been clear from the beginning that sporadic military adventures and systematic backing of the most complacent forces would not work as a substitute for comprehending the nature and appeal of communism, particularly in the backward regions of the world. But this much, at least, must be said: that the official thinkers in Washington were no worse than the run-of-the-mill politicians in their understanding of America's role.

## THE RISE AND FALL OF THE NEW

It is fashionable to proclaim the death of modernism, of the avant-garde, of everything associated with the idea of the new. But Barbara Rose's forceful piece in this issue is the only one I've seen about any of the arts that attempts to show concretely why what seems radical in painting is really a regression. Her argument, largely formal, is that the new realism is reopening a question — the problem of realism — that has been already solved by modern painting. She also ties this into the social scene with the observation that the new realism has converted painting into an object, a celebration of the moment, to be felt, enjoyed, discarded, like other objects — all part of a throw-away culture given to instant gratification.

I don't know whether Barbara Rose is right or not, but the question hinges not only on one's taste but on one's sense of the direction of modern painting. And she has a definite idea of this direction, influenced to some extent by Clement Greenberg, who was one of the first to chart the history of contemporary art, and whose views have formed either the basis or the point of departure for much current thinking about painting and sculpture. Many people would question not only the kind of map Barbara Rose has drawn, but also the idea of determinism behind it. Still, unless we have some sense of the main currents to supplement our taste, I don't see how, as John Weitz suggests in his review of Harold Rosenberg in this issue of *P.R.*, we can make intelligent judgments of new work. And though there is a strong movement today to abolish judgment, it seems to me to be an act of bad faith, since sensibility itself involves judgment, and to pretend we are not always judging is an illusion masking bad judgment.

The situation in writing is quite different from that in painting, perhaps because it is a less formal art and because the lines of force are more varied and less clear. And the question of realism in fiction is more complicated. In fact, many of the younger and more innovative writers are turning against the false realism of storytelling.

A common view of the situation, held by writers critical of the current scene, is that the modernist and avant-garde traditions have been taken up by the popular media and assimilated by the culture as a whole. There is, of course, much to be said for this view, even though

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it has a certainty and finality lacking in history itself. But in a recent issue of *Commentary,* Hilton Kramer carries the position one step further, arguing not only that the "adversary" stand associated with modernism has become a meaningless gesture with nothing to pit itself against since the middle class enemy has surrendered, but also that the "adversary" aspect of modernism is only one half the equation, the other half being a strong tie to tradition. And, according to Kramer, the avant-garde has become an "academy of innovation," because it has dissociated itself almost entirely from tradition. Kramer's piece is strongly argued, but I think he underestimates the genuine "adversary" sensibility today and inflates the past by equating it with tradition. It is true, as Kramer (quoting T. S. Eliot) maintains, that serious modern works, however advanced, did not so much destroy as remake tradition, but the fact is they recreated it in a radical way and through a highly selective idea of tradition. And even though, as Kramer reminds us again, many vanguard and modernist figures were not radical in their political views, still they were part of an "adversary" culture in their elitism and their general antipathy to conventional values and ideas.

The trouble with talking about tradition unselectively is that it fails to distinguish between what is usable and what is unusable. If, as Kramer feels, new writing today should have stronger connections with tradition, the question still remains what that tradition is. Does it, for example, include the conventional or the unconventional figures of the last few decades? Does it mean a return to the subversive sensibility of the earlier modernists?

I think a serious adversary spirit does exist among a number of writers in this country, particularly among countless poets whose values are not those of the media or the official culture. But lacking an immediate tradition they have to invent one, and thus create an impression of shrillness, discontinuity, and posturing that the upholders of tradition find both frivolous and menacing. **W. P.**

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## Doris Lessing

# ON THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

The shape of this novel is as follows: There is a skeleton, or frame, called *Free Women,* which is a conventional short novel, about 60,000 words long, and which could stand by itself. But it is divided into five sections and separated by stages of the four Notebooks — Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue. The Notebooks are kept by Anna Wulf, a central character of *Free Women.* She keeps four, and not one because, as she recognizes, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness — of breakdown. Pressures, inner and outer, end the Notebooks; a heavy black line is drawn across the page of one after another. But now that they are finished, from their fragments can come something new, *The Golden Notebook.*

Throughout the Notebooks people have discussed, theorized, dogmatized, labeled, compartmented — sometimes in voices so general and representative of the time that they are anonymous. You could put names to them like those in the old Morality Plays: Mr. Dogma and Mr. I-Am-Free-Because-I-Belong-Nowhere, Miss I-Must-Have–Love and-Happiness and Mrs. I-Have-To-Be-Good-At-Everything-I–Do, Mr. Where-Is-A-Real-Woman? and Miss Where-Is-A-Real-Man?, Mr. I'm-Mad-Because-They-Say-I-Am, and Miss Life-Through–Experiencing-Everything, Mr. I-Make-Revolution-And-Therefore-I-Am, and Mr. and Mrs. If-We-Deal-Very-Well-With-This-Small-Problem–Then-Perhaps-We-Can-Forget-We-Daren't-Look-At-The-Big-Ones. But they have also reflected each other, been aspects of each other, given birth to each other's thoughts and behavior — *are* each other, form wholes. In the inner "Golden Notebook," things have come together,

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the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation — the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity. Anna and Saul Green, the American, "break down." They are crazy, lunatic, mad — what you will. They "break down" into each other, into other people, break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts; the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other, dissolve. They hear each other's thoughts, recognize each other in themselves. Saul Green, the man who has been envious and destructive of Anna, now supports her, advises her, gives her the theme for her next book, *Free Women* — an ironical title, which begins: "The two women were alone in the London flat." And Anna, who has been jealous of Saul to the point of insanity, possessive and demanding, gives Saul the pretty new notebook, *The Golden Notebook,* which she has previously refused to do, gives him the theme for his next book, writing in it the first sentence: "On a dry hillside in Algeria a soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle." In the inner "Golden Notebook," which is written by both of them, you can no longer distinguish between what is Saul and what is Anna, and between them and the other people in the book.

This theme of "break down" — that sometimes when people "crack up" it is a way of self-healing — of the inner self's dismissing false dichotomies and divisions, has of course been written about by other people, as well as by me, since then. But this is where, apart from the odd short story, I first wrote about it. Here it is rougher, more close to experience, before experience has shaped itself into thought and pattern — more valuable perhaps because it is rawer material.

But nobody so much as noticed this central theme, because the book was instantly belittled, by friendly reviewers as well as by hostile ones, as being about the sex war, or was claimed by women as a useful weapon in the sex war.

I have been in a false position ever since, for the last thing I have wanted to do was to refuse to support women.

To get the subject of Women's Liberation over with — I support it, of course, because women are second-class citizens, as they are saying energetically and competently in many countries. It can be said that they are succeeding, if only to the extent they are being seriously listened to. All kinds of people previously hostile or indifferent

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say: "I support their aims but I don't like their shrill voices and their nasty ill-mannered ways." This is an inevitable and easily recognizable stage in every revolutionary movement: reformers must expect to be disowned by those who are only too happy to enjoy what has been won for thm. I don't think that Women's Liberation will change much though — not because there is anything wrong with its aims, but because it is already clear that the whole world is being shaken into a new pattern by the cataclysms we are living through: probably by the time we are through, if we do get through at all, the aims of Women's Liberation will look very small and quaint.

But this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation. It described many female emotions of aggression, hostility, resentment. It put them into print. Apparently what many women were thinking, feeling, experiencing, came as a great surprise. Instantly a lot of very ancient weapons were unleashed, the main ones, as usual, being on the theme of "she is unfeminine," "she is a man-hater." This particular reflex seems indestructible. Men — and many women — said that the suffragettes were defeminized, masculine, brutalized. There is no record I have read of any society anywhere when women demanded more than nature offers them that does not also describe this reaction from men — and some women. A lot of women were angry about *The Golden Notebook*. What women will say to other women, grumbling in their kitchens and complaining and gossiping or what they make clear in their masochism, is often the last thing they will say aloud — a man may overhear. Women are the cowards they are because they have been semislaves for so long. The number of women prepared to stand up for what they really think, feel, experience with a man they are in love with is still small. Most women will still run like little dogs with stones thrown at them when a man says, "You are unfeminine, aggressive, you are unmanning me." It is my belief that any woman who marries, or takes seriously in any way at all, a man who uses this threat, deserves everything she gets. For such a man is a bully, does not know anything about the world he lives in, or about its history — men and women have taken infinite numbers of roles in the past, and do now, in different societies. So he is ignorant, or fearful about being out of step — a coward. . . . I write all these remarks with exactly the same feeling as if I were writing a

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letter to post into the distant past: I am so sure that everything we now take for granted is going to be utterly swept away in the next decade.

(So why write novels? Indeed, why! I suppose we have to go on living *as if*. . . .)

Some books are not read in the right way because they have skipped a stage of opinion, assume a crystallization of information in society which has not yet taken place. This book was written as if the attitudes that have been created by the Women's Liberation movement already existed. It came out first ten years ago, in 1962. If it were coming out now for the first time it might be read, and not merely reacted to: things have changed very fast. Certain hypocrisies have gone. For instance, ten, or even five years ago — it has been a sexually contumacious time — novels and plays were being plentifully written by men furiously critical of women — particularly from the States but also in this country — who portrayed women as bullies and betrayers, but particularly as underminers and sappers. But these attitudes in male writers were taken for granted, accepted as sound philosophical bases, as quite normal, certainly not as woman-hating, aggressive, or neurotic. It still goes on, of course — but things are better, there is no doubt of it.

I was so immersed in writing this book, that I didn't think about how it might be received. I was involved not merely because it was hard to write — keeping the plan of it in my head I wrote it from start to end, consecutively, and it was difficult — but because of what I was learning as I wrote. Perhaps giving oneself a tight structure, making limitations for oneself, squeezes out new substance where you least expect it. All sorts of ideas and experiences I didn't recognize as mine emerged when writing. The actual time of writing, then, and not only the experiences that had gone into the writing, was really traumatic: it changed me. Emerging from this crystallizing process, handing the manuscript to publisher and friends, I learned that I had written a tract about the sex war, and fast discovered that nothing I said then could change that diagnosis.

Yet the essence of the book, the organization of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalize.

"Bound. Free. Good. Bad. Yes. No. Capitalism. Socialism. Sex.

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Love. . . ." says Anna, in *Free Women,* stating a theme — shouting it — announcing a motif with drums and fanfares . . . or so I imagined. Just as I believed that in a book called *The Golden Notebook,* the inner section called the "Golden Notebook" might be presumed to be a central point, to carry the weight of the thing, to make a statement.

But no.

Other themes went into the making of this book, which was a crucial time for me: thoughts and themes I had been holding in my mind for years came together.

One was that it was not possible to find a novel which described the intellectual and moral climate of a hundred years ago, in the middle of the last century, in Britain, in the way Tolstoy did it for Russia, Stendhal for France. (At this point it is necessary to make the obligatory disclaimers.) To read *The Red and the Black,* and *Lucien Leuwen* is to know that France as if one were living there, to read *Anna Karenina* is to know that Russia. But a very useful Victorian novel never got itself written. Hardy tells us what it was like to be poor, to have an imagination larger than the possibilities of a very narrow time, to be a victim. George Eliot is good as far as she goes. But I think the penalty she paid for being a Victorian woman was that she had to be shown to be a good woman even when she wasn't according to the hypocrisies of the time — there is a great deal she does not understand because she is moral. Meredith, that astonishingly underrated writer, is perhaps nearest. Trollope tried the subject but lacked the scope. There isn't one novel that has the vigor and conflict of ideas in action that is in a good biography of William Morris.

Of course this attempt on my part assumed that that filter which is a woman's way of looking at life has the same validity as the filter which is a man's way . . . setting that problem aside, or rather, not even considering it, I decided that to give the ideological "feel" of our mid-century, it would have to be set among socialists and Marxists, because it has been inside the various chapters of socialism that the great debates of our time have gone on; the movements, the wars, the revolutions, have been seen by their participants as movements of various kinds of socialism, or Marxism, in advance, containment, or retreat. (I think we should at least concede the

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possibility that people looking back on our time may see it not at all as we do — just as we, looking back on the English, the French, or even the Russian Revolutions see them differently from the people living then.) But "Marxism" and its various offshoots, has fermented ideas everywhere, and so fast and energetically that, once "way out," it has already been absorbed, has become part of ordinary thinking. Ideas that were confined to the far Left thirty or forty years ago had pervaded the Left generally twenty years ago, and have provided the commonplaces of conventional social thought from Right to Left for the last ten years. Something so thoroughly absorbed is finished as a force — but it was dominant, and in a novel of the sort I was trying to do, had to be central.

Another thought that I had played with for a long time was that a main character should be some sort of an artist, but with a "block." This was because the theme of the artist has been dominant in art for some time — the painter, writer, musician, as exemplar. Every major writer has used it, and most minor ones. Those archetypes, the artist and his mirror-image the businessman, have straddled our culture, one shown as a boorish insensitive, the other as a creator, all excesses of sensibility and suffering and a towering egotism which has to be forgiven because of his products — in exactly the same way, of course, as the businessman has to be forgiven for the sake of his. We get used to what we have, and forget that the artist–as-exemplar is a new theme. Heroes a hundred years ago weren't often artists. They were soldiers and empire builders and explorers and clergymen and politicians — too bad about women who had scarcely succeeded in becoming Florence Nightingale yet. Only oddballs and eccentrics wanted to be artists, and had to fight for it. But to use this theme of our time "the artist," "the writer," I decided it would have to be developed by giving the creature a block and discussing the reasons for the block. These would have to be linked with the disparity between the overwhelming problems of war, famine, poverty, and the tiny individual who was trying to mirror them. But what was intolerable, what really could not be borne any longer, was this monstrously isolated, monstrously narcissistic, pedestaled paragon. It seems that in their own way the young have seen this and changed it, creating a culture of their own in which hundreds and thousands of people make films, assist in making films, make

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newspapers of all sorts, make music, paint pictures, write books, take photographs. They have abolished that isolated, creative, sensitive figure — by copying him in hundreds of thousands. A trend has reached an extreme, its conclusion, and so there will be a reaction of some sort, as always happens.

The theme of "the artist" had to relate to another, subjectivity. When I began writing there was pressure on writers not to be "subjective." This pressure began inside communist movements, as a development of the social literary criticism developed in Russia in the nineteenth century, by a group of remarkable talents, of whom Belinsky was the best known, using the arts and particularly literature in the battle against Czarism and oppression. It spread fast everywhere, finding an echo as late as the fifties, in this country, with the theme of "commitment." It is still potent in communist countries. "Bothering about your stupid personal concerns when Rome is burning" is how it tends to get itself expressed, on the level of ordinary life — and it was hard to withstand, coming from one's nearest and dearest, and from people doing everything one respected most: like, for instance, trying to fight color prejudice in South Africa. Yet all the time novels, stories, art of every sort, became more and more personal. In the "Blue Notebook," Anna writes of lectures she has been giving: "Art during the Middle Ages was communal, unindividual; it came out of a group consciousness. It was without the driving painful individuality of the art of the bourgeois era. And one day we will leave behind the driving egotism of individual art. We will return to an art which will express not man's self-divisions and separateness from his fellows but his responsibility for his fellows and his brotherhood. Art from the West becomes more and more a shriek of torment recording pain. Pain is becoming our deepest reality. . . . I have been saying something like this. About three months ago, in the middle of this lecture, I began to stammer and couldn't finish. . . ."

Anna's stammer was because she was evading something. Once a pressure or a current has started, there is no way of avoiding it: there was no way of *not* being intensely subjective — it was, if you like, the writer's task for that time. You couldn't ignore it: you couldn't write a book about the building of a bridge or a dam and not develop the mind and feelings of the people who built it. (You

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think this is a caricature — Not at all. This "either/or" is at the heart of literary criticism in communist countries at this moment.) At last I understood that the way over, or through this dilemma, the unease at writing about "petty personal problems" was to recognize that nothing is personal, in the sense that it is uniquely one's own. Writing about oneself, one is writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions — and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas — can't be your alone. The way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity," that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvelous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience — or so you think of it when still a child, "*I* am falling in love," "*I* am feeling this or that emotion, or thinking that or the other thought" — into something much larger: growing up is after all only the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares.

Another idea was that if the book were shaped in the right way, it would make its own comment about the conventional novel: the debate about the novel has been going on since the novel was born, and is not, as one would imagine from reading contemporary academics, something recent. To put the short novel *Free Women* as a summary and condensation of all that mass of material, was to say something about the conventional novel, another way of describing the dissatisfaction of a writer when something is finished: "How little I have managed to say of the truth, how little I have caught of all that complexity; how can this small neat thing be true when what I experienced was so rough and apparently formless and unshaped."

But my major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped.

As I have said, this was not noticed.

One reason for this is that the book is more in the European tradition than the English tradition of the novel. Or rather, in the English tradition as viewed at the moment. The English novel after

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all does include *Clarissa* and *Tristram Shandy, The Tragic Comedians* — and Joseph Conrad.

But there is no doubt that to attempt a novel of ideas is to give oneself a handicap: the parochialism of our culture is intense. For instance, decade after decade bright young men and women emerge from their universities able to say proudly: "Of course I know nothing about German literature." It is the mode. The Victorians knew everything about German literature, but were able with a clear conscience not to know much about the French.

As for the rest — well, it is no accident that I got intelligent criticism from people who were, or who had been, Marxists. They saw what I was trying to do. This is because Marxism looks at things as a whole and in relation to each other — or tries to, but its limitations are not the point for the moment. A person who has been influenced by Marxism takes it for granted that an event in Siberia will affect one in Botswana. I think it is possible that Marxism was the first attempt, for our time, outside the formal religions, at a world-mind, a world ethic. It went wrong, could not prevent itself from dividing and subdividing, like all the other religions, into smaller and smaller chapels, sects, and creeds. But it was an attempt.

This business of seeing what I was trying to do — it brings me to the critics, and the danger of evoking a yawn. This sad bickering between writers and critics, playwrights and critics: the public have got so used to it they think, as of quarreling children: "Ah yes, dear little things, they are at it again." Or: "You writers get all that praise, or if not praise, at least all that attention — so why are you so perennially wounded?" And the public are quite right. For reasons I won't go into here, early and valuable experiences in my writing life gave me a sense of perspective about critics and reviewers; but over this novel, *The Golden Notebook,* I lost it: I thought that for the most part the criticism was too silly to be true. Recovering balance, I understood the problem. It is that writers are looking to the critics for an *alter ego,* that other self more intelligent than oneself who has seen what one is reaching for, and who judges you only by whether you have matched up to your aim or not. I have never yet met a writer who, faced at last with that rare being, a real critic, doesn't lose all paranoia and become gratefully attentive — he has found what he thinks he needs. But what he, the writer, is asking

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is impossible. Why should he expect this extraordinary being, the perfect critic (who does occasionally exist), why should there be anyone else who comprehends what he is trying to do? After all, there is only one person spinning that particular cocoon, only one person whose business it is to spin it.

It is not possible for reviewers and critics to provide what they purport to provide — and for which writers so ridiculously and childishly yearn.

This is because the critics are not educated for it; their training is in the opposite direction.

It starts when the child is as young as five or six, when he arrives at school. It starts with marks, rewards, "places," "streams," stars — and still in many places, stripes. This horse-race mentality, the victor and loser way of thinking, leads to: "Writer X is, is not, a few paces ahead of Writer Y"; "Writer Y has fallen behind"; "in his last book Writer Z has shown himself as better than Writer A." From the very beginning the child is trained to think in this way: always in terms of comparison, of success, and of failure. It is a weeding-out system: the weaker get discouraged and fall out; a system designed to produce a few winners who are always in competition with each other. It is my belief — though this is not the place to develop this — that the talents every child has, regardless of his official "I.Q.," could stay with him through life, to enrich him and everybody else, if these talents were not regarded as commodities with a value in the success-stakes.

The other thing taught from the start is to distrust one's own judgment. Children are taught submission to authority, how to search for other people's opinions and decisions, and how to quote and comply.

As in the political sphere, the child is taught that he is free, a democrat, with a free will and a free mind, lives in a free country, makes his own decisions. At the same time he is a prisoner of the assumptions and dogmas of his time, which he does not question, because he has never been told they exist. By the time a young person has reached the age when he has to choose (we still take it for granted that a choice is inevitable) between the arts and the sciences, he often choose the arts because he feels that here is humanity, freedom, choice. He does not know that he is already molded by a sys-

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tem: he does not know that the choice itself is the result of a false dichotomy rooted in the heart of our culture. Those who do sense this, and who don't wish to subject themselves to further molding, tend to leave, in a half-unconscious, instinctive attempt to find work where they won't be divided against themselves. With all our institutions, from the police force to academia, from medicine to politics, we give little attention to the people who leave — that process of elimination that goes on all the time and which excludes, very early, those likely to be original and reforming, leaving those attracted to a thing because that is what they are already like. A young policeman leaves the Force saying he doesn't like what he has to do. A young teacher leaves teaching, her idealism snubbed. This social mechanism goes almost unnoticed — yet it is as powerful as any in keeping our institutions rigid and oppressive.

These children who have spent years inside the training system become critics and reviewers, and cannot give what the author, the artist, so foolishly looks for — imaginative and original judgment. What they can do, and what they do very well, is to tell the writer how the book or play accords with current patterns of feeling and thinking — the climate of opinion. They are like litmus paper. They are wind gauges — invaluable. They are the most sensitive of barometers of public opinion. You can see changes of mood and opinion here sooner than anywhere except in the political field; it is because these are people whose whole education has been just that — to look outside themselves for their opinions, to adapt themselves to authority figures, to "received opinion" — a marvelously revealing phrase.

It may be that there is no other way of educating people. Possibly, but I don't believe it. In the meantime it would be a help at least to describe things properly, to call things by their right names. Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this: "You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors.

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It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself — educating your own judgment. Those that stay must remember, always and all the time, that they are being molded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society."

Like every other writer, I get letters all the time from young people who are about to write theses and essays about my books in various countries — but particularly in the United States. They all say: "Please give me a list of the articles about your work, the critics who have written about you, the authorities." They also ask for a thousand details of total irrelevance, but which they have been taught to consider important, amounting to a dossier, like an immigration department's.

These requests I answer as follows: "Dear Student. You are mad. Why spend months and years writing thousands of words about one book, or even one writer, when there are hundreds of books waiting to be read. You don't see that you are the victim of a pernicious system. And if you have yourself chosen my work as your subject, and if you do have to write a thesis — and believe me I am very grateful that what I've written is being found useful by you — then why don't you read what I have written and make up your own mind about what you think, testing it against your own life, your own experience. Never mind about Professors White and Black."

"Dear Writer," they reply, "but I have to know what the authorities say, because if I don't quote them, my professor won't give me any marks."

This is an international system, absolutely identical from the Urals to Yugoslavia, from Minnesota to Manchester.

The point is, we are all so used to it, we no longer see how bad it is.

I am not used to it, because I left school when I was fourteen. There was a time I was sorry about this, and believed I had missed out on something valuable. Now I am grateful for a lucky escape. After the publication of *The Golden Notebook,* I made it my business to find out something about the literary machinery, to examine the process which made a critic, or a reviewer. I looked at innum-

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erable examination papers — and couldn't believe my eyes; sat in on classes for teaching literature, and couldn't believe my ears.

You might be saying: "That is an exaggerated reaction, and you have no right to it, because you say you have never been part of the system." But I think it is not at all exaggerated, and that the reaction of someone from outside is valuable simply because it is fresh and not biased by allegiance to a particular education.

But after this investigation, I had no difficulty in answering my own questions: Why are they so parochial, so personal, so small-minded? Why do they always atomize, and belittle, why are they so fascinated by detail, and uninterested in the whole? Why is their interpretation of the word "critic" always to find fault? Why are they always seeing writers as in conflict with each other, rather than complementing each other? Simple, this is how they are trained to think. That valuable person who understands what you are doing, what you are aiming for, and can give you advice and real criticism, is nearly always someone right outside the literary machine, even outside the university system; it may be a student just beginning, and still in love with literature, or perhaps it may be a thoughtful person who reads a great deal, following his own instinct.

I say to these students who have to spend a year, two years, writing theses about one book: "There is only one way to read, which is to browse in libraries and bookshops, picking up books that attract you, reading only those, dropping them when they bore you, skipping the parts that drag — and never, never reading anything because you feel you ought, or because it is part of a trend or a movement. Remember that the book which bores you when you are twenty or thirty will open doors for you when you are forty or fifty —and vice versa. Don't read a book out of its right time for you. Remember that for all the books we have in print, there are as many that have never reached print, have never been written down; even now, in this age of compulsive reverence for the written word, history, even social ethic, are taught by means of stories, and the people who have been conditioned into thinking only in terms of what is written — and unfortunately nearly all the products of our educational system can do no more than this — are missing what is before their eyes. For instance, the real history of Africa is still in the custody of black storytellers and wise men, black historians, medicine men: it is a verbal

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history, still kept safe from the white man and his predations. Everywhere, if you keep your mind open, you will find the truth in words *not* written down. So never let the printed page be your master. Above all, you should know that the fact that you have to spend one year, or two years, on one book, or one author, means that you are badly taught — you should have been taught to read your way from one sympathy to another, you should be learning to follow your own intuitive feeling about what you need: that is what you should have been developing, not the way to quote from other people."

But unfortunately it is nearly always too late.

It did look for a while as if the recent student rebellions might change things, as if the students' impatience with the dead stuff they are taught might be strong enough to substitute something more fresh and useful. But it seems as if the rebellion is over. Sad. During the lively time in the States, I had letters with accounts of how classes of students had refused their syllabuses, and were bringing to class their own choice of books, those that they had found relevant to their lives. The classes were emotional, sometimes violent, angry, exciting, sizzling with life. Of course this only happened with teachers who were sympathetic, and prepared to stand with the students against authority — prepared for the consequences. There are teachers who know that the way they have to teach is bad and boring — luckily there are still enough, with a bit of luck, to overthrow what is wrong, even if the students themselves have lost impetus.

Meanwhile there is a country where . . .

Thirty or forty years ago, a critic made a private list of writers and poets which he, personally, considered made up what was valuable in literature, dismissing all others. This list he defended lengthily in print, for "The List" instantly became a subject for much debate. Millions of words were written for and against — schools and sects, for and against, came into being. The argument, all these years later, still continues . . . no one finds this state of affairs sad or ridiculous. . . .

Where there are critical books of immense complexity and learning, dealing, but often at second or third hand, with original work — novels, plays, stories — the people who write these books form a stratum in universities across the world — they are an international

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phenomenon, the top layer of literary academia. Their lives are spent in criticizing, and in criticizing each other's criticism. They at least regard this activity as more important than the original work. It is possible for literary students to spend more time reading criticism and criticism of criticism than they spend reading poetry, novels, biography, stories. A great many people regard this state of affairs as quite normal, and not sad and ridiculous. . . .

Where I recently read an essay about Antony and Cleopatra by a boy shortly to take A levels. It was full of originality and excitement about the play, the feeling that any real teaching about literature aims to produce. The essay was returned by the teacher like this with this comment: "I cannot mark this essay, you haven't quoted from the authorities." Few teachers would regard this as sad and ridiculous. . . .

Where people who consider themselves educated, and indeed as superior to and more refined than ordinary non-reading people, will come up to a writer and congratulate him or her on getting a good review somewhere — but will not consider it necessary to read the book in question, or ever to think that what they are interested in is success. . . .

Where when a book comes out on a certain subject — let's say star-gazing — instantly a dozen colleges, societies, television programs, write to the author asking him to come and speak about star-gazing. The last thing it occurs to them to do is to read the book. This behavior is considered quite normal, and not ridiculous at all. . . .

Where a young man or woman, reviewer or critic, who has not read more of a writer's work than the book in front of him, will write patronizingly, or as if rather bored with the whole business, or as if considering how many marks to give an essay, about the writer in question — who might have written fifteen books, and have been writing for twenty or thirty years — giving the said writer instruction on what to write next, and how. No one thinks this is absurd, certainly not the young person, critic, or reviewer, who has been taught to patronize and itemize everyone for years, from Shakespeare downward.

Where a Professor of Archeology can write of a South American tribe which has advanced knowledge of plants, and of medicine and

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of psychological methods: "The astonishing thing is that these people have no written language. . . ." And no one thinks him absurd.

Where, on the occasion of a centenary of Shelley, in the same week and in three different literary periodicals, three young men, of identical education, from our identical universities, can write critical pieces about Shelley, damning him with the faintest possible praise, and in identically the same tone, as if they were doing Shelley a great favor to mention him at all — and no one seems to think that such a thing can indicate that there is something seriously wrong with our literary system.

Finally . . . this novel continues to be, for its author, a most instructive experience. For instance, ten years after I wrote it, I can get, in one week, three letters about it, from three intelligent, well-informed, concerned people, who have taken the trouble to sit down and write to me. One might be in Johannesburg, one in San Francisco, one in Budapest. And here I sit, in London, reading them, at the same time, or one after another — as always, grateful to the writers, and delighted that what I've written can stimulate, illuminate — or even annoy. But one letter is entirely about the sex war, about man's inhumanity to woman, and woman's inhumanity to man, and the writer has produced pages and pages all about nothing else, for she — but not always a she — can't see anything else in the book.

The second is about politics, probably from an old Red like myself, and he or she writes many pages about politics, and never mentions any other theme.

These two letters used to be, when the book was as it were young, the most common.

The third letter, once rare but now catching up on the others, is written by a man or a woman who can see nothing in it but the theme of mental illness.

But it is the same book.

And naturally these incidents bring up again questions of what people see when they read a book, and why one person sees one pattern and nothing at all of another pattern, and how odd it is to have, as author, such a clear picture of a book, that is seen so very differently by its readers.

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And from this kind of thought has emerged a new conclusion: that it is not only childish of a writer to want readers to see what he sees, to understand the shape and aim of a novel as he sees it, but that his wanting this means that he has not understood a most fundamental point — which is that the book is alive and potent and fructifying and able to promote thought and discussion *only* when its plan and shape and intention are not understood, because that moment of seeing the shape and plan and intention is also the moment when there isn't anything more to be got out of it.

And when a book's pattern and the shape of its inner life is as plain to the reader as it is to the author — then perhaps it is time to throw the book aside, as having had its day, and start again on something new.

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# POEMS

## Edwin Brock

### POSE ONE

Often I dream
of shit in a tiled
urinal an institutional
urinal of walking
in it in bare feet
of sitting in it
of shit which will not
flush away because
every outlet is blocked
with the ooze of a
hundred bowels
and the torn remnants
of a hundred newspapers

those mornings my bath
stinks of Dettol
and every square inch
of my fat flesh
is indecent with
Wrights Coal Tar soap

I breakfast with Ravel
Debussy Cesar Franck
clean my teeth with
Beethoven and Bach
and take each sound to
prick tears

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on bad days I pray
on the sharp shingle
of Cromer Beach
letting the North Sea
drain blood from
the cuts like
shipwreck notes
in old bottles
and tiptoe away
between the oil slick
and dead seabirds

I know at night
I will be there again
between the same
sweating walls
reading the notes about
John Brown's prick
and who's sucking it off
and in the morning
I will try the same
formula of art and prayer

it will never work
and one day I will
recognise it for what it is:
some kind of insight
on some kind of walk
to a place
something like Damascus.

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## POSE FOUR

This morning
the plain sea-surface
with nothing pre-determined

or into a simple wind
a bird throws those notes
with no intent

making a beginning

I am here
sickened by silences
and surfaces

saying I love
like the bird
its great arm reaching out

to where the god
leaves claw marks
raking along his side.

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**Colin Falck**

## HONEYMOON

Flaunting your breasts in the warmth of the space heater
You smile, and throw in my face
The black nightdress I bought you.
We are beginning to understand one another.

## THE SNOW

The snow
Falls over London, blanketing
All life. Things
Move softly now
In a stillness of warmth
And expectation.
The flakes fall finely,
Bringing with them
The silence of forests
That finger the edges
Of northern cities.
A lingering
Pall of breath
Hangs over the brightness
Wrapping everything
In the warm whiteness
Of death.

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## IN BROMPTON CEMETERY

Slowly, the spring sun
Lifts the morning mist —
Dissolving absurdities,
Teasing the broken lines of greying crosses
To a Graeco-Roman splendour.

## INTERVAL

The wind has dropped,
And there is only the gentle rain,
Fine and soft as the feel of your body in its underslip
As I kneel and take strength from you.

## CACTUS FLOWER

Nothing much can happen. Which is why
She invites me, plying me with wine,
Food, cigarettes, music from ancient lands
Where black-shawled women died to make her possible —
Lighting a candle carefully next to me
With hands she knows I long to touch.

## PERFORMANCE

The scene varies
But the action is the same —
Carmen
Delilah
Cleopatra
Amneris,
Sending their men to their death.

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## SNOW AGAIN

Snow again — the end
Of another year's vigil. It comes,
Searching me out,
Companionable, almost friendly.
I catch the crystals on the back of my hand
And watch them melt.

My hands remind me of yours.
This snow will pass. Under it the trees
Are in bud already and waiting.

## THE DANCER

She moves
Where life and death are one — her gestures
Creating and destroying all things.

When the gods speak
We must remain silent.

This is the last art.
Beyond empires and metaphysics
It is this
That all things return to.

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## Susan Sontag

# Scenes from BROTHER CARL

## PREFACE

MARCH 1969. The day after I had checked the first print of *Duet for Cannibals* back from the laboratory, it was screened for Goran Lindgren, the president of Sandrew Film & Teater AB, the company that had produced the film. At Lindgren's request, he saw it alone at ten o'clock on a Saturday morning, in a private screening room in the empty Sandrew office building; I came ten minutes after the screening started and spent the next hour and half laboriously reading three Friday Stockholm newspapers in the corridor. In the time since I had first come to Sweden, on his unexpected invitation, in July 1968, to make a film, Lindgren and I had hardly ever meet; he had never appeared on the set, come to the rushes, or turned up during the editing and mixing. What he said in the corridor after that screening took about a minute. He liked *Duet for Cannibals,* he told me. I was "welcome" in Sweden the following year to make another film. We shook hands, he turned toward his office, and I went into the street to look for the sun. A few days later, without seeing Lindgren again, I left Stockholm. So accustomed was I by that time to the laconic, shy, spectacularly honest Swedes that it never occurred to me to wonder if I needed something like a contract or a letter to be sure that Sandrew really meant to produce my second film. And, of course, I didn't.

EARLY JANUARY 1971. The first print of *Brother Carl* has just come back from the laboratory. A different screening room, for Sandrew has new offices now, but the same ritual: Lindgren inside, alone, the first to see the finished film, and me, late on purpose, alone, in the cor-

* NOTE: *Brother Carl* had its first public screening at the Cannes Film Festival under the auspices of the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs, in May 1971. It is distributed by New Yorker films in the United States. In France it has been released under the title *Les Gémeaux,* and in Italy, as *I Gemilli.* The film's length is ninety-five minutes.

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ridor. End of screening. Some polite words of inquiry about when I am leaving for France, and a handshake. Not a word about *Brother Carl,* which does and does not surprise me since there was a rumor circulating in the company well before the shooting began that Lindgren had decided Sandrew should lay off film production altogether for a while. He turns toward his office, and I go down into the street — though not to look for the sun. In Stockholm in January, even noon is still night. I find that I'm relieved not to be asked back. That particular, intense, "Swedish" trip inside my head is over. I can start making films elsewhere: France perhaps; soon, I hope, the United States.

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*Brother Carl* took longer to write than *Duet for Cannibals.* After the première of *Duet for Cannibals* in May 1969, I spent most of the summer in Italy. I redid the new film in my head several times, confident that I could write it out quickly. Only as I started putting *Brother Carl* down on paper, when I returned to New York in September, did I realize how many tough questions about film narration and construction the making of *Duet for Cannibals* had opened up for me. I also had the benefit of an interlocutor this time. Throughout most of the autumn my friend Florence Malraux participated intellectually in the genesis of *Brother Carl* and gave the emerging script several hours each day of passionate, skeptical, and delicate criticisms. I want here to express my deep and loving gratitude for that dialogue we had together.

The first draft was finished in December. I sent it on to Lindgren and to the minority producer, Harry Schein of the Swedish Film Insittute, before arriving in Stockholm in mid-January 1970. During a two-week stay, I put together the crew (many had worked with me on *Duet for Cannibals*), chose some of the locations (the hotel, Martin's summer house, the abandoned fort, the abandoned factory), and spoke with actors. Gunnel Lindblom agreed to play Lena, as I had hoped, for the part had been written with her in mind. It took a long, hard discussion with Lindgren to convince him to let me shoot in black-and-white, which he was understandably reluctant to do since this now severely limits a film's commercial possibilities. I simply could not imagine *Brother Carl* — a winter's tale, to be shot in late summer: far north — as a color film. As I saw it in my head, it was self-evidently a film in black-and-white, more accurately, black-to-white images: about a present haunted by an untellable "black" act of corruption that lies in the past, transfixed by an unmerited "white" act of healing that waits in the future.

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When I left Stockholm at the beginning of February 1970, I stopped off in Paris, hoping that I could persuade Laurent Terzieff (an actor I'd admired for years but had never met) to accept the role of Carl. I discovered he was not in Paris but was on tour for the whole month. The phone call which finally reached him was to the backstage of a theater in a small city whose name I've forgotten, an hour before curtain time. Apologetic, and forced to shout (the connection being up to the usual Paris-to-provinces standard) in my far from perfect French, I tried to explain who I was, that I wanted him to be in a film, and that I hoped to come to see him that week, wherever he would be. To my astonishment and pleasure, he replied that my trip wouldn't be necessary, since he could tell me right away that he would like to work with me. Two minutes after the start of our conversation, without giving me time even to tell him the theme of the film or what his role would be, and undeterred by my warning that he (like everyone working on the film) would be paid next to nothing, I had his promise to put aside three months to come to Sweden. If perhaps unconsciously I had become prepared by Lindgren to receive unexpected gifts of trust, Terzieff's two-minute consent, blind, over the telephone (we did not meet until two months later), had nothing of the stately tone of Lindgren's one minute in the corridor the previous March. No one could be more un-Swedish than ascetic, exacting, ardent, generous Laurent — who was to be, quite simply, perfect in his understanding of Carl. More confident in the script now that I knew Terzieff would play Carl, I went back to New York and rewrote it once more.

It was Laurent Terzieff who first observed — when I sent him the script a month later — that in the tormented history of Martin and Carl I was evoking the legendary relationship between Diaghilev and Nijinsky. I told him he was right, and I know it helped Terzieff to believe that in the weeks he spent preparing for the role before he arrived in Stockholm in July. But, in point of fact, it's not true. My distant real-life models were quite another, more contemporary director (theater, not ballet) and his holy fool. But even they were only the vaguest of starting points for *Brother Carl*. The characters that became Martin and Carl are, as I now know, people who have lived for decades inside my head — emblems of the dramaturgy of silence (or voluntary mutism) that has been an obsessive theme in my life and in my novels as well as my films. Silence haunts *The Benefactor*, not only as a recurrent option in the plot but, more important, in the off-centered loquacity of the narrator (and the oppressive weight of all that he does *not* tell). Voluntary mutism is what tempts Diddy throughout the long meditation on dying which is the argument of *Death Kit*; and in

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his pilgrim's progress toward death, Hester's blindness is another, transposed form of silence. In *Duet for Cannibals,* the catalytic member of the quartet, Francesca, refuses to speak. And the Francesca figure reappears in *Brother Carl,* doubled: as the almost mute Carl and as the autistic child. Looking back now, I recognize in Martin a new version of the psychological fascist in *Duet for Cannibals.* Martin is a Bauer past his prime; a Bauer who has already wreaked the maximum amount of damage; a Bauer who, in a state of exhaustion, revulsion, and weary cynicism, has lost his appetite for playing games and even hopes to behave decently.

Out of the script for *Duet for Cannibals,* which was written in English, I chose to make a Swedish-language film. I had engaged three extremely talented Swedish actors, who all spoke English fluently. But I knew they would not have the same freedom or expressiveness if they acted their roles in English. No actor, however talented, retains his or her full range in a second language. (For the fourth member of the quartet, the Italian actress Adriana Asti, the question was irrelevant; since she spoke neither English nor Swedish, she would in either case still have had to learn her relatively few lines phonetically.) So the script was translated into Swedish, which did wonders for my hitherto lazy progress in learning Swedish. English remained the language of the set — the language of all discussions with the crew and the actors (except for Adriana Asti) — but the actors spoke Swedish when they were before the camera.

With *Brother Carl,* I started with the same elements: Swedish actors who, along with Geneviève Page, spoke fair to excellent English; and Laurent Terzieff, who spoke neither English nor Swedish and would, whatever my decision, have to learn his part phonetically, as Adriana Asti had done in *Duet for Cannibals.* This time, I did not have the script translated into Swedish. I decided to exploit the very peculiarity of my situation — an American director, working with a largely bilingual cast, in a country in which English is the official second language. By asking the actors to perform in English, I knew that I was abridging their range and diminishing their comfort. But I wanted them to work from within that very handicap. Whereas in *Duet for Cannibals* I had simply aimed at getting "good" (i.e., professional, subtle) performances out of the actors, I asked something less traditional from the actors in *Brother Carl.* I wanted to incorporate as a *formal* element in the film the very difficulties they would have sometimes in speaking English — the play of accents, their hesitations, misplaced rhythms, stiffnesses.

The material of *Brother Carl* (unlike *Duet for Cannibals*) seemed well suited to this kind of experiment, since the plot itself turned on

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the dilemmas of speaking, of being silent — of finding it hard (or questionable) to speak at all. This notion of the acting completed what I had been trying to do when I wrote the actors' lines. The dialogue in *Brother Carl* is much more consistently "de-naturalistic" than that of *Duet for Cannibals,* which alternates between scraps of everyday banalities and passages of schizoidlike declamation. In *Brother Carl,* the "interference" of everyday life is bleached out, as far as I could do that and still stay within the bounds of some kind of psychological realism. In successive drafts of *Brother Carl,* most "naturalistic" touches were cut — for the same reason that I decided not to let any of the characters be seen smoking. (Considered as "real" people, both Lena and Karen would undoubtedly be chain smokers — like Tomas in *Duet for Cannibals.*) The actors' accents in English would confirm (rather than "distance" even further) this elliptical, formal kind of dialogue.

* * *

I went to Stockholm for the first ten days of June 1970 to confer with the set designer and finish the casting, and returned to start full preparations in early July. Shooting began on August 3 and continued, over a period of eight weeks, through September 26: exactly forty-six shooting days. We shot in black-and-white 35 mm. film with one Arriflex camera and recorded the dialogue with a Nagra — but as "guide track," because I had decided to re-record everything, after the film was edited, in a sound studio.

From the second week of shooting on, I began working nights with Lars Hagström in the Sandrew editing room, and when the shooting ended we already had a rough cut of most of the film. The final editing was done in October, during which I also worked with the composer Torbjörn Ludqvist (whom Hagström had recommended) on the music. The dubbing and mixing were done in November and December. All the actors dubbed themselves; even the six-year-old Pernilla Alfeldt, who had never acted before and knew no English, managed Anna's flow of laughter and single line at the end of the film ("He's heavy!") very creditably.

In the post-shooting work on *Brother Carl,* the most interesting part for me concerned the sound. Except for the way music is used, the knocking motif and the construction of what Tomas hears on the tape recorder, the sound track of *Duet for Cannibals* — considered as layers of sound — is neither original nor particularly interesting. All the actors' lines and most of the sound effects were those that had been recorded during the shooting — embedded in the subliminally fuzzy aural "atmosphere" that fills every "real" space, however quiet. The result was a wholly serviceable, functional sound. (It was remark-

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ably clean, too, considering that we filmed entirely on locations in and around a city, not in a studio; every good "take" a victory over the menace of a rumbling stomach, a passing car, a neighbor's crying child, a low-flying airplane.) But it was a dry sound; and, most important, it added little, formally, to the film. In *Brother Carl,* I wanted to render the sound elements essential to the structure of the film not just to its narrative sense. With the very best "direct" sound I would still have had only a two-dimensional sketch of what a formally *active* sound track could contain. Everything had to be done (or redone) in a studio, after the film was edited.

As the actors came, one by one, to re-record their lines, I asked them sometimes to imitate what they heard on the "guide track," sometimes to give a contrasting reading. Not limited to using what had come out in the single inspiration of the "take" that was best all-round, I could manipulate the contrast between their "expressive" and their "artificial" ways of speaking. After this final stage of work with the actors came several weeks recreating the "effects." As in *Duet for Cannibals,* these were commonplace (doors opening and closing, objects dropping, footsteps, the crackling of a fire, the dial tone), but in *Brother Carl* they were redone so as to have an abrasive, partly artificial sound — acquiring a presence in the film that sound effects recorded "direct" can never have. I wanted to use the effects like the actors' accents in English — as an abstract, musical element; not just for sense.

In late December, mixing the film, I worked to set up a certain play among the three elements: dialogue, sound effects, and music. Some of the music was mixed "too loud." Occasionally, I covered an actor's line with an effect to make the line harder to hear. I never stopped thinking of the dialogue as important. But I also wanted to include, as a formal element in the film, a certain *resistance* to the dialogue — almost like a physical resistance or obstacle — which testifies to the way speaking as such is put in question in the situation narrated in *Brother Carl.* Against language itself, which is a kind of colonialization of the feelings, the film evokes the deeper but more dangerous contact between people that is created by the challenge of a mute presence, by an apparent inability (or unwillingness) to speak.

* * *

*Brother Carl* tells a story, linear in form, about real people stripped down to their imaginary psychology.

Though not conscious of it when writing the script, I now see that *Brother Carl* starts from the same plot "form" as *Duet for Cannibals*: a tale of couples. But the range and the tone are very different. In the

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relatively simple dialectics of *Duet for Cannibals,* one couple (Francesca and Arthur Bauer), solidly if bizarrely united, metaphorically devour and then regurgitate another, younger couple (Ingrid and Tomas), whose life together is failing. *Brother Carl* also shows two couples — one already failed (Lena and Martin, divorced five years before the film's action begins) and another who continue together in unconsummated estrangement (Karen and Peter Sandler). At the beginning of *Brother Carl,* Karen and Peter are in somewhat the same sterile, discontented state of semifailure as the younger Ingrid and Tomas. (Karen is near forty and Peter is in his early thirties, while both Ingrid and Tomas are in their middle to late twenties.) But the two couples are not simply left to intersect with each other, as in *Duet for Cannibals.* For they are not alone. On each side there is a "child," a child who is too angry or too wounded to speak. Martin has his genius protégé, who used to dance. The Sandlers have their young daughter, whom all sounds interest except words. The introduction of that refusal — that pathos and pain incarnated by the "child" — generates the more complex interchanges of this couple story. While nobody in *Brother Carl* (unlike *Duet for Cannibals*) is shown as able to make love physically, the characters do try to care for each other. Some have already surrendered their capacity to give and to receive, however. Their exchanges of energy are not, basically, "cannibalistic" — only, for the most part, futile or misplaced. Lena, who is strong and decent and deserves to live, makes the mistake of attaching her life to the struggle to reclaim love — and loses. Karen, who is weak and selfish and hardly "merits" anything in her own right, is rewarded.

The thematic resemblances between *Duet for Cannibals* and *Brother Carl,* such as I can detect now, only confirm my pleasure in what I understood earlier to be the differences between the two films. What counts most for me about *Brother Carl* is that it takes a step beyond *Duet for Cannibals*: the spatial relations within the shots are subtler, the editing is more intelligent, the use of sound is more sophisticated, and the dialectic between the characters is more complex. It is a handsomer film (in terms of lighting, set design, suppleness of the camera) than *Duet for Cannibals;* it is also, probably because my feelings are more exposed in it, sometimes clumsier. In this sense, *Brother Carl* stands in somewhat the same relation to *Duet for Cannibals* as my second novel stands to my first novel. Both *The Benefactor* and *Duet for Cannibals* have in common a considerable emotional reticence, a recoil from pain that masks itself as humor. In *Brother Carl,* as in *Death Kit,* pain is more visible; no one is being ironic at the expense of his or her own suffering. I don't mean that I prefer the second

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film to the first, any more than I prefer the second novel to the first. But I know that, as the aim of *Brother Carl* (like that of *Death Kit*) was more ambitious, the risks taken far greater, the results more uneven and less harmonious, those passages in *Brother Carl* which do work surpass anything I was able to accomplish in *Duet for Cannibals.*

* * *

From the beginning, when I first imagined *Brother Carl,* the center was the miracle. The narrative was to build toward two miracles: one that does not take place (the resurrection of Lena), and one that does (the healing of Anna), in whatever terms a miracle is thinkable now. Though the miracle Carl does manage to bring off is far from the "traditional" miracle pictured in Dreyer's *Ordet,* which takes place within the setting of a still pious, rural society, I feel strongly influenced by my memory of *Ordet.* I saw the film only once, about fifteen years ago, and doubt that I remember it accurately. But that film, probably greatly transformed by the willfulness of memory, has remained all these years as a kind of ideal experience of my imagination — along with Dreyer's last film, *Gertrud,* and Bunraku theater, and the films of Jean-Marie Straub.

The only interesting action in life is a miracle or the failure to perform a miracle; and miracles are the only subject of profound interest left for art. I say this as someone who has tried to perform a kind of miracle (that effort being the deepest personal source of *Brother Carl*), or, more modestly, to help a miracle come to pass. When I started to write the script, I was in the throes of that effort. The week after the end of shooting, in Rome, I learned I had failed. That failure has not destroyed my belief in miracles.

*Paris*
*June 1972*

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# BROTHER CARL

CAST

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|---|---|
| CARL NOREN | *Laurent Terzieff* |
| KAREN SANDLER | *Geneviève Page* |
| LENA HOLMBERG | *Gunnel Lindblom* |
| MARTIN ERICSSON | *Kjeve Hjelm* |
| PETER SANDLER | *Torsten Walhlund* |
| ANNA SANDLER | *Pernilla Alfeldt* |

CREDITS

Written and directed by: *Susan Sontag*
Produced by: *Sandrew Film & Teater AB and Svenska Filminstitutet*

15. Front room of Martin's cottage. Soon after.

Medium close-up of Lena. Her expression is tender, self-confident. (The audience shouldn't realize in this shot that we are back in Martin's house.)

LENA: *You shouldn't let yourself put on so much weight.*

Long shot of Martin, standing near window. He crosses the room. Lena's next line comes as he passes in front of her, blocking her from sight. (In the previous shot, perhaps Lena is blocking Martin.)

LENA: *You're naturally thin.*

Without any visible reaction to Lena's words, Martin passes to the right of the shot (unblocking our view of Lena) and leans over the fireplace. He throws in a fresh log. As the fire flares up, Lena, still sitting, reaches out and touches his waist.

LENA: *You don't get enough exercise any more.*

Lena stands up, close to him. She touches his hair.

LENA: *It's matted.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: The three scenes printed here are from different sections of the script.

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Martin's face takes on a soft, vague expression. Lena sinks to the floor before the fireplace — the camera drops with her — and beckons to him. For a second, only Martin's legs are visible. Then the upper part of his body comes into the shot, as he kneels down beside her. Lena pulls Martin's head toward her with one hand — he moves as she wants — while taking a comb out of her pocket with the other.

Full shot of Karen, standing in the same place by the door, looking out of the frame. She is watching them. The audience should be surprised that she's there again.

High angle two-shot, from Karen's point of view, of Martin and Lena. Martin lies stretched out on the floor, his head in Lena's lap. Lena passes the comb through his hair, then caresses it. Martin is looking up at Karen.

MARTIN: *Are we making you uncomfortable?*

KAREN (off): *No.*

MARTIN: *Embarrassed?*

KAREN (off): *No.*

MARTIN: *Perhaps you're moved.* (pause) *Do we seem pathetic?*

Long shot, low angle, which includes all three. Martin and Lena are in the foreground: Martin is shown full-face, Lena in profile. Karen, behind them and slightly out of focus, is looking down at them. Karen shakes her head. Her expression is still impassive. Lena continues to caress Martin's hair. The movements of Lena's hands should recall those of Karen as she caressed Peter's hair in Sequence 6. (To suggest this to the audience, perhaps this shot should try to come as close as possible to the angle and framing of the final shot of 6.)

Medium close-up of Karen. She has noticed the resemblance of Lena's gestures with Martin's hair to hers with Peter's, and her expression is no longer neutral.

KAREN: *I'm a little sad, that's all. I'm sad there are so few ways to show tenderness.*

Medium shot (high angle?) of Lena and Martin. She glances up for a second in Karen's direction. Then, as if she disliked this turn

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in the conversation and wished to end it, Lena passes the comb roughly through Martin's hair. He grimaces.

MARTIN: *That's enough!*

He sits up on his line. The camera dollies back fast as he gets to his feet and with both hands pulls Lena up beside him. What we have now is a medium shot of Lena and Martin, both seen in profile, facing each other. They don't speak for a second. The atmosphere is charged. Martin runs his fingers through his hair, making it messy again.

LENA: *Let me cut it for you.* (Or: *Where are the scissors?*)

MARTIN: *No.*

The camera pans to follow Martin as he goes to the fireplace; he is now farther from the camera than before, putting him in full shot. Without apparent hesitation, Martin pulls out a small burning stick and sets fire to his hair. We hear the sound (off) of Karen's scream. The camera dollies in closer as Martin quickly puts out the flames with his hands.

MARTIN: *Now it's shorter.*

Long shot, which includes all three. Karen is only partly shown — her head and left shoulder — in the front of the shot, and she's a little out of focus. Martin and Lena occupy the midground, in sharp focus. Probably they are once again in profile, echoing the earlier two-shot just before Martin burned his hair. This shot should give the impression of two strongly different spatial planes, and dramatically sum up Karen's ambiguous role in this situation — part intruder, part arbiter, part voyeur — as well as her own psychological intermittences, produced by her conflicting reactions of distaste, detachment, fascination.

LENA: *Is it a contest then?*

MARTIN: *I hope not. I'd like to stop you.*

LENA: *Why? Because one of us has to lose.*

Martin shakes his head.

MARTIN: *We've already lost.*

LENA: *Not enough. Just enough to keep one of us from winning.* (pause)

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LENA: *I'm willing to lose if I know it's also possible to win.*

Medium shot of Martin, showing three-fourths of his face. He is off-center, on the right side of the image, and faces diagonally across the frame.

MARTIN: *But I'm not sure* I'm *willing to lose any more, Lena . . . I may not be ready to fight you.*

LENA (off): *Don't fight.*

Martin pauses before answering.

MARTIN: *I have to.*

LENA (off): *Do you know why I'm here?*

Medium shot of Lena, the reverse of the previous shot. She is off-center, on the left side of the image, facing diagnoally toward the right.

MARTIN (off): *Yes.*

LENA: *And your answer?*

The camera moves a little to the left, to put Lena in the center of the image. Exactly at the moment it halts, we hear Martin's response.

MARTIN (off): *No.*

45. Outside Carl's cabin. Early evening.

Long shot of Lena prowling about. She stands near the door indecisively; then she peers inside the window. She wears the same clothes as she has worn since Sequence 35. No natural sounds. Music.

46. Inside Carl's cabin. Some minutes later.

Long still shot of the interior of Carl's cabin. It is very small, almost cavelike; and cluttered and dirty. There is a heavy fur rug on the floor, and a narrow bed with wooden sides (or perhaps just a mattress on the floor against the wall), with a crucifix hanging above it on the wall. A kerosene lamp at the foot of the bed throws strong shadows. There is a Russian icon in front of the lamp; lined up on the floor or on windowsills are several of Carl's collections: shells, rocks, driftwood. . . . The shot shows only the lower part of Carl's bed, on the right side of the frame. The bed, heaped with blankets, is so messy that we don't see he's lying there. The image

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is held for several seconds. Then, as we hear the sound of a door opening, the camera moves slightly to the right — enough to show the whole bed. Now we see that Carl is there. He is lying on his side, perhaps in a fetal position, wearing his baggy pants and overlarge wool shirt or his grey pajama tops. His eyes are open, vacant. He doesn't move on the sound of the door.

Full shot from Carl's viewpoint, of Lena standing in the cabin doorway.

LENA: *It's warm here.*

Medium shot of Carl. Now he seems frightened. He stands up on the bed, his back against the wall, breathing noisily.

Full shot of Lena. Perhaps the camera is behind her, just outside the door. She approaches Carl.

LENA: *You think I don't like you. That's not true.*

She reaches out and touches Carl's face. He flinches.

LENA: *Let me. You know you like it.*

Carl's breathing becomes quiet. Lena sits on the bed. The camera tilts down with her. Now we see Carl only from the waist down. Lena looks up at him.

LENA: *Sit. Sit next to me.*

Hesitantly, Carl lowers himself, keeping his back against the wall, until he comes to a sitting position on the bed behind Lena. She turns. She undoes the buttons on his shirt and takes it off. Carl makes no move to stop her. Then she reaches for his fly. Carl stands up abruptly, in the same position (again we see him only from the waist down). Lena continues what she was about to do, almost without pause. When, from this position, she pulls down his trousers, Carl offers no resistance. But when she then reaches up for his underpants, he stops her.

Close-up of Carl's hand on Lena's. She takes her hand away.

Full shot of another wall of the room. Lena stands up (into the shot) and quickly undresses down to her underpants and bra.

Full shot, high angle, of Carl lying back on the bed (from Lena's point of view). Lena, coming into the shot, gets in bed beside him and pulls a blanket over them both. She embraces him, which he allows passively. But when she tries to kiss him, he turns his face away. Then she lies on top of him. He becomes a little animated.

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Medium shot, taken from the side of the bed. Carl is trying clumsily to make love, but he's impotent. Lena whispers.

LENA: *What can I do?*

Carl doesn't answer. Lena moves off Carl and lies at his side, propped up on one elbow. She is nearer the wall. The upper part of Carl's head is in the foreground at the bottom of the image. The camera moves to the left as Lena bends over Carl's torso. She slides her body down the bed, further under the blanket. Just as her head is about to disappear, Carl's hand comes into the shot. He has grabbed Lena's hair to stop her. She looks up at him questioningly.

LENA: *Tell me what you'd like.*

Reverse angle of the previous medium shot. Carl shakes his head. Lena moves back up on the bed, so her face is near his.

LENA: *Shall I talk? About what a woman likes.*

Again Carl shakes his head.

LENA: *No? . . . I'll tell you about other men I've been with. What they did.*

Carl shakes his head more emphatically, and shifts restlessly on the bed. Lena coves him with her arm to quiet him.

LENA: *There must be something. . . .*

Carl, staring at her, wets his lips. There is a note of entreaty in his voice.

CARL: *Are you willing . . . to go . . . very . . . far?*

Lena is startled. She doesn't answer.

CARL: *Say!*

LENA: *Yes.*

Medium close-up. Carl moves on top of Lena, getting tangled up in the blankets. We see only their two torsoes.

LENA (off): *Let's go very far.*

He thrashes about for a few seconds. Then, still impotent, he rolls off her.

LENA (off): *Hurt me.*

Carl's torso rises out of the shot.

Medium shot taken from behind the head of the bed. Carl is

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kneeling at the foot of the bed, in the midground, facing the camera. The lower part of Lena's body — she is lying on her back — is in the foreground. Carl looks down at Lena with a blank expression. His voice is flat.

CARL: *Martin has made you bad, too.* (pause) *I want to kill you.*

Medium shot of Lena, from Carl's point of view. She looks frightened.

LENA: *Why?*

Back to previous shot of Carl at the foot of the bed.

CARL: *Because you're bad and the world has to be good.*

His voice becomes louder.

CARL: *Say it.*

He falls heavily on top of her (toward the camera). His head is now in the foreground of the shot.

CARL: *Say: you can kill me.*

LENA (off): *You can kill me.*

Long shot taken from the side of the bed. Carl pulls the blanket over them. Then they begin to make love violently, or perhaps all the movement is Carl's and Lena is completely passive. The act, under the pile of blankets, seems grotesque. . . . We hear the sound of the door opening, and see a spot of light on the blankets.

Full still shot, from Lena and Carl's viewpoint, of Martin standing in the doorway. He holds a flashlight before him.

Full shot of the bed. Lena jerks away from Carl, sits up, and pulls the blanket around her. Carl falls back, inert. The light goes off.

MARTIN (off): *Don't get up.*

His voice is calm, almost tender. Lena quickly gets out of bed, pulling off the blanket as she rises and holding it against the front of her body with one hand. She looks off camera (at Martin).

LENA: *But I didn't want to!*

The camera tilts down as Lena stoops and gathers up her clothes with the other hand. Partly bent over, she looks up at Martin again.

LENA: *I want to be with you.*

Lena stands. We hear the sound of the door closing.

* * *

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## Leszek Kolakowski

# REVOLUTION AND REFORM

Let us summarize the arguments for the position that the communist system is not reformable. According to this view, the primary function of the communist system is to assure the ruling apparatus a monopoly of power; that changes in the past or the future do not alter this principle; and that despotic power cannot be dissolved partially (which is almost a tautology, since monopoly cannot by definition be partial). It is also argued that all changes can be rescinded, for they cannot be institutionalized without dissolving the whole mechanism. Hence the basic needs of both the working class and the intelligentsia cannot be realized within the limits set by the system.

Stalinism — a bloody, ruthless, personal tyranny — was the embodiment of the system. The subsequent softening of the terror has in no way altered the despotic nature of the system or the peculiarly socialist forms of oppression and exploitation. We are dealing with a rigid organism, without self-regulating devices, capable of change only when faced with violent upheavals; but apart from superficial concessions and regroupings within the ruling cliques, these upheavals do not leave any scars on its body.

Because this system is directed against society, which is deprived of all institutional forms of self-defense, the only change imaginable is one achieved by violent upheaval. Furthermore, such an upheaval must involve the entire system, because Soviet arms will always be used to suppress all revolutionary efforts. Some expect an upheaval would lead to a truly socialist society; others think a West European style of capitalism would be the only solution, because of the economic and ideological bankruptcy of socialism.

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What are the main features of Soviet socialism which are thought to resist a partial, gradual, evolutionary "humanization" of the system?

1. What is commonly called "democratization" is felt to be inconceivable within the system. This is so because despotism and the monopoly of production, investment, employment, and distribution go hand in hand. The ruling oligarchy is the sole employer and administrator of the means of production. Thus, any step toward democratization is a *partial dispossession* of the ruling class which, though not the legal owner of the means of production, has all the rights and privileges of one. It presents no danger to the party to permit workers to discuss details of their jobs, or committees appointed by the party to discuss details of economic policy. For all decisions are made by the ruling apparatus; and control of the news media keeps differences of opinion from becoming a form of social pressure. Hence any attempts by economists to introduce reforms that would weaken the monopoly of the ruling apparatus must fail.

2. The natural tendency of the system is to reduce the role of experts, particularly in economic, cultural, and social matters. Experts are barely tolerated, and only as advisors without the right to make decisions, and are replaced, whenever possible, by politically servile people. That is why incompetence, bungling, and opportunism are built into the mechanism of rule and cannot be regarded as temporary defects. The mechanism prevents purely technical criteria from playing any role.

3. Freedom of information — an indispensable condition for the smooth functioning of the economy, education, and culture — is clearly inconceivable in a system which would die once such freedom existed. Equally inconceivable is any prospect of freedom of information even for insiders, with the facts doled out in doses appropriate to their position in the hierarchy. However they might clamor for information for their own use, members of the ruling apparatus are bound to be misinformed, and victimized by their own lies. Stalin coped with unfavorable statistics by murdering the statisticians and derived his knowledge of life on collective farms from films. True, this kind of travesty is no longer the rule, but this does not alter the fact that the misinformation of rulers is built into the system. Since the suppliers of information, or misinformation, for

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inner party use are usually in the lower echelons and must bear responsibility for their reports, unfavorable news becomes self–denunciation and is punishable, while favorable news is rewarded. Besides, the gathering of genuine information would require the setting up of a large apparatus entirely free and indpendent — which would be not only an anomaly but a threat to the ruling class. Moreover, much of this information makes for tensions and conflicts at the higher rungs of the apparatus. There is no such thing as innocent or neutral information; all facts are immediately used by rival groups or cliques aspiring to higher positions, and are directed against the occupants of these positions. Even if the universal rule of self–deception seems to be stupid, it is actually one of the system's defense mechanisms. Though the ruling groups sometimes have to pay for their lies, it is worth while (particularly since the cost is borne largely by society) because the lies strengthen the power structure.

4. Another feature of Soviet socialism is the intellectual and moral degradation of the decision-making apparatus, inherent in the political mechanism and subject to the intentions of the rulers. As in all despotic systems, one's career is furthered by servility, cowardice, lack of initiative, readiness to denounce, and indifference to social opinion and the public interest. And one is handicapped by imagination, self-reliance, honesty, and concern for the public welfare. Thus there is a natural selection of cadres. The fourteen years of Gomulka's rule in Poland, for example, were highlighted by elimination of competent and gifted people and the elevation of cowardly and submissive ones. Since March 1968, the mass promotion of ignoramuses, denouncers, and racketeers ("an invasion of bedbugs," as it has been called in Warsaw) has been intensified. There are some exceptions, but they are rare; and except in moments of crisis, few brave and competent people can be found in the party apparatus itself, especially in the political and propaganda sections, where the principle of selecting the worst candidate is almost always triumphant.

5. Despotic governments produce the need for permanent, or at least periodic, aggression. That war is a grave for democracy has been known for centuries. But in the absence of an external war, despotisms use artificial means and fictitious enemies to create a psychotic state of siege. Hence acts of brutality against selected

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groups, chosen according to the most varied criteria, become a function of the power mechanism, which cannot exist without a deadly enemy. In this way, the ruling class can quickly mobilize itself and its resources to ward off any threat to its power.

6. The power monopoly must also dissolve all forms of social life it has not decreed. Because social conflicts are not eliminated, they find the most varied forms of expression, and even the most innocent forms of social organization not under strict police supervision become an opposition. Hence the tendency to "nationalize" all forms of social life, to destroy all spontaneous social ties and substitute for them compulsory pseudo-ties whose functions are negative and destructive, and which do not represent any interests other than those of the ruling class. For as much as the system needs its enemies, it fears all forms of organized opposition; it wants to have enemies only of its own choosing and to fight these enemies on terms it itself selects. A despotism needs to instill fear in the people while simultaneously depriving them of all means of organized resistance; and one of its instruments is a criminal code worded so ambiguously as to make the largest possible number of citizens feel they are criminals, and to permit the police and the party to manipulate the law arbitrarily.

7. The ruling apparatus is not free to grant rights to the citizen, even if it wanted to, because of the danger of self-destruction. Experience shows that democratic concessions lead only to ever greater pressures that threaten the entire political order.

These then are the arguments in support of the thesis that the peculiarly socialist form of enslavement cannot be liquidated partially or reduced by gradual reforms, and must be destroyed totally and all at once.

I think this thesis is untrue, and to advocate it is defeatist rather than revolutionary. For it is never possible to define in advance the limits of a social organization's elasticity, and past experience does not indicate that the despotic model of socialism is absolutely rigid. The rigidity of a system depends *in part* on the degree to which the people living in it *are convinced of its rigidity*. The belief in *nonreformability* is based on the ideology of "all or nothing," characteristic of persons reared in the Marxist tradition, but unsupported by his-

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torical experience. Basically, the bureaucratic socialist despotism is caught in insoluble contradictions that weaken its cohesiveness.

The mechanisms that seem to prove that socialist despotism is not subject to reform are indeed part of the system. It is therefore logical to assume that in the absence of resistance, repression will increase and the system will develop into an Orwellian model. However, one cannot conclude that *no* resistance movement can resist these tendencies, and produce at least a viable form of socialist organization, if not a perfect society. The reformist posture would indeed be absurd if all it relied on were the goodwill of the exploiting class, the philanthropy of the apparatus of oppression, or any self-generated action by the system. It is not absurd, however, if one envisions an active resistance taking advantage of contradictions inherent in the system.

In this respect, an analogy could be drawn with capitalism. As Marx observed, capitalism was torn by a growing class polarization, pauperization of the proletariat, decrease in profits, anarchy, periodic crises of over-production, mass unemployment, and the disappearance of the middle classes; and reforms could not abolish the fundamental laws of the system, which are rooted in "the wolf-like hunger for surplus value," and which define all productive processes. The only reforms that could affect the system were primarily political, such as strengthening proletarian solidarity and training it for the final showdown. For Marx one of the most important forces against capitalist accumulation was the resistance of the working class. It was impossible, however, to predict the strength of these forces; that is why, although Marx's analyses were empirical, his conviction that the laws of capitalism would "ultimately" turn out to be stronger than the resistance of the exploited classes, was ideological. If his expectations of an increasing degradation and pauperization of the proletariat as well as a growing anarchy of production were not confirmed, it was because of long years of struggle and confrontation, which forced bourgeois society to make certain compromises.

Analogies of this kind are, of course, not fully satisfactory. It is clear that the socialist bureaucracy has learned from the bourgeoisie how dangerous freedom can be. Hence resistance to oppression and exploitation in a Soviet-style despotism must be carried out under more difficult conditions than in the past: no exploiting class in his-

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tory has had at its disposal such enormous powers. This concentration of power is not only a source of strength, however, but also of weakness, as can be seen from the whole post-Stalinist history of communism.

Essentially, of course, the nature of the system demands a total concentration of power. That is why Stalin's power (and that of his local *satraps*) was the perfect embodiment of despotic socialism. However, if it is now impossible to restore that concentration of power, it is because it is impossible to reconcile two of the values so essential to the ruling apparatus: unity and security. Conflicts within the apparatus cannot be institutionalized because they would threaten the system as a whole; such institutionalization would, in effect, legalize factions in the party, making it not too different from a multiparty system. But groups, cliques, and factions do exist. The ideal is the absolute tyranny of one tyrant, so impoverished intellectually and morally as not to be limited by "abstract" principles, but cunning enough to prevent the emergence of groups within the apparatus by successive murders and purges, in a perennial climate of uncertainty and fear. But this is precisely what works against the need for security within the apparatus, whose members — as can easily be imagined — do not want to live under conditions in which every functionary, including members of the Secretariat and the Politburo, can overnight — and at the whim of his chief — be transferred from the office to the basement of a police station. Hence, the switchover from one-man rule to an oligarchy — called collective leadership — has been in the best interests of the ruling machine, though for the population, it doesn't make much difference whether the documents certifying their oppression are signed by one person or a dozen people. Oligarchy is not, of course, democracy; though limits to the extent of terror affects the stability of power and leads to decentralization (not democratization), by extending the rights of local party apparatuses. The party apparatus cannot prevent the emergence of hidden factions and is constantly weakened by rival bodies. Similarly, a resistance movement develops not in periods when oppression and terror are most severe, but in periods of relative relaxation produced by a lack of cohesion within the ruling apparatus: it is to Lenin that we owe this observation. The present apparatuses are not as susceptible to ideological stresses as was the Stalinist appara-

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tus — which, because of this susceptibility, lost its balance after Stalin's moral downfall — but they are being demoralized by conflicts among rival groups. In this sense, it might be said that partial "de-Stalinization," carried out under pressure, led to a decline of power, which, in turn, enabled the resistance movement to function. In other words, as long as the apparatus is stable and immune to political stresses, it can usually ignore society's discontents. Once this stability is gone, fear of the leader and the police is replaced by a perpetual fear of rivals, of local and foreign chiefs, of the working class, the intelligentsia, and even of the small groups of intellectuals of society.

Another insurmountable contradiction of bureaucratic socialism is the conflict with as well as the need for a radical ideology, hence impossibility of dispensing with Stalinist-Leninist ideology. In contrast to a democracy, in which social consensus is the basis of its legality, a despotism is sustained by an ideological system, however impoverished it may be. In the Soviet world, legitimacy rests on the principle that the ruling party is the embodiment of the interests of the working class and the whole nation, and that the state is part of the great international workers' movement, which has consolidated its rule in certain parts of the globe and anticipates further victories. Internationalist rhetoric is indispensable to the Soviet rulers, for it is their only form of legitimacy; it also serves to justify the dependence of local rulers on the center as well as their own power. It might seem, for instance, that the Soviet rulers could ignore nonruling communist parties, whose efforts to seize power they do not even openly encourage, and that the schisms within these parties should be of no political significance to them. However, the Soviet rulers do not ignore these parties, because if they abandoned communist action in countries outside their control, they would also have to abandon the principles that justify this control. That is why the rulers fall victim to their own ideology and all its nonsense. It is, of course, paradoxical that this system of ideology in which no one believes — neither those who order others to proclaim it, those who benefit from proclaiming it, or those who are required to listen to it — is still of such crucial importance. The dead and by now grotesque body of Marxist-Leninism is a burden on the rulers, impeding their freedom of movement. As an instrument of persuasion in the

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Soviet bloc, it has no value whatever, a fact well known to those in power; thus, propaganda directed at society and the party refers less and less frequently to ideology and concentrates instead on the national interest and raison d'être. But this is precisely what produces new contradictions within the system. For, in addition to the open propaganda, there exists, as we know, a kind of unstated propaganda which is sometimes more important, consisting of certain ideas and principles which cannot be spelled out in speeches or newspapers, but which must nevertheless be communicated to society. In the Soviet Union, it is the idea of the great power, the glory of the huge empire that rules over a large part of the globe, more or less directly. Imperialist ideology, in contrast to official Marxist-Leninism, can, of course, be partially effective. But in the people's democracies, this unspoken ideology, communicated by allusions and hints, is an ideology designed merely to foster fear of Soviet tanks. If it is at all successful, it is only because it convinces people that the Russian leaders can easily destroy a disobedient protectorate; no finesse is needed to drive this argument home. To an extent, both these unarticulated ideologies — inside and outside Russia — converge; but to rely on their convergence as a permanent basis for rule is, of course, a short-sighted policy, not only because in each case the ideology does not supplement, but clearly contradicts, the official Marxist one, but also because it may achieve its goal — temporary pacification — at the cost of arousing national animosities which seem advantageous in periods of peace, but which can, in critical moments, be very dangerous. There is, however, no other way out if the ruling apparatus is to retain even minimal contact with its subjects.

Among the jokes authored by Stalin, one has become famous: "And how many divisions does the Pope have?" The cynicism of this question illustrates most eloquently the poverty of a system which has lost everything except its divisions (however important they may be), and has forgotten that it is itself the product of a revolution that was victorious not because of its military force, but because of the moral disintegration of the Czarist regime and army.

The ideological paralysis of bureaucratic socialism becomes more and more widespread and irreversible; campaigns devoted to "ideological struggle" may invent new methods of repression, but they cannot offer society anything but the same boring slogans. Attempts

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to overcome this have produced rhetorics of nationalism and of order and productivity, around which loose factions congregate. Nationalist slogans are of little value, however, for the essential question — real national sovereignty — is by the very nature of things insoluble. Slogans about order and productivity would be effective if they could develop a workable "technocratic" program. But such a program means the primacy of production and technology over politics; it can thus be achieved only if the ruling apparatus sacrifices some of its power — again, the price would be the partial dispossession of the ruling class. We are dealing here with yet another contradiction of the system, namely, that between technology and politics. Although this brings to mind Marx's descriptions of capitalism, the contradiction has never been so evident as in the system which was to have done away with it. But technological advance (not limited to military techniques) and even an increase in consumption (despite certain political advantages the ruling class can derive from widespread poverty and a shortage of goods) are, for a number of reasons, in the interests of the ruling class. At the same time, popular expectations are raised, because the flow of information can never be stopped completely, by a comparison with life in highly developed countries; so, even when conditions are improving, popular dissatisfaction may increase sharply, and it is never possible to foresee at which point it will become explosive. Hence the rulers are caught in the contradiction between expanding the economy and retaining their power.

If, however, this contradiction cannot be resolved, it does not mean, as Isaac Deutscher seemed to expect, that the socialist system will "become more and more democratic" under the impact of technology. The contradiction between technology and the political system can be the source of progress only when it takes the form of social conflict: a conflict between the class maintaining the mechanism of exploitation and the working class allied with the intelligentsia as a whole.

The above contradictions are compounded by yet another contradiction involving the countries within the Soviet empire. The ruling apparatus in the satellite has a vested interest in maintaining its dependence on the Soviet Union as a guarantee of its own position, but, at the same time, it is interested in weakening that dependence

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to extend its freedom to make its own decisions. This creates tensions in the political machine and makes it vulnerable to social pressure. National sovereignty is not in itself sufficient to bring about the emancipation of the working people, but it is obviously an indispensable condition. Fear of the brotherly cannon in the East is not, of course, unfounded, though it is deliberately intensified as a means of squelching even the most modest demands, and of convincing the people that all their efforts are futile. In fact, Poland, as well as the other nations within the Soviet sphere, try to exert a constant pressure to weaken their dependence without provoking military conflict. Here, too, the ideology of "all or nothing" is disastrous, and to accept it would be tantamount to agreeing to "nothing." No one can be so blind as to believe that Poland's national status is the same as Lithuania's, or that the nature of Poland's dependence did not change between 1952 and 1957. There are, then, degrees of dependence and nonsovereignty, and the differences cannot be minimized. In this regard, the role of teachers and those working in the humanities is crucial.

For if the Polish nation successfully resisted Russification and Germanization during the partitions, it was mainly thanks to this social class. Had this class not existed, the Polish nation would have shared the fate of the Lusatian nation, which has managed to retain its language, but without its own culture and its own intelligentsia has little chance of survival. Poland as a cultural entity has survived thanks to those who created the Committee for National Education — thanks to the nineteenth century teachers, writers, historians, philologists, and philosophers who, despite the odds, worked to extend the heritage of national culture. Similarly, the Czech nation, which at one point was threatened with Germanization, survived through the efforts of its intellectuals. Those who today suppress the free dvelopment of national culture are Poland's enemies.

If I declare myself for "reformism," it is not because I prefer "legality" to "illegality." The distinction is meaningless in a situation where neither one is defined by law, but decided by the police and party apparatus through arbitrary interpretation of vague decrees. In a country where the rulers can, if they wish, arrest and punish citizens for owning illegal books, conversing on political subjects with

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a few friends, telling jokes, and for incorrect opinions in private letters, the very concept of legality is senseless. Obviously, the best way to combat illegal persecution of this kind is to make the "crime" as widespread as possible. When I speak about the reformist posture, I have in mind a belief in the effectiveness of partial and gradual pressure within the larger perspective of social and national liberation. Despotic socialism cannot be regarded as a totally unpliable system, for there are no such systems. In fact, some pliability has been revealed in the past few years in as basic an area as decision-making, which falls under the jurisdiction of official ideology. The limits of ideological control have been narrowed quite significantly: party functionaries can no longer pretend to know more about medicine than professors of medicine do, or more about philology than philologists do. True, they still know more about literature than writers do. But in Poland, even in this area, certain irreversible changes have taken place. Official ideological interference is still unbearable, but significantly less so when we remember the not so distant time when state doctrine defined the width of the trouser leg, the color of socks, and the laws of genetics, all at the same time. Someone might say that what we have here is a progression from slavery to feudalism. We are not, however, faced with a choice between degradation and freedom, but only with a choice between accepting degradation and trying to preserve certain human values. All over the world, we are witnessing the breakdown of rigid orthodoxies. The churches have lost the sanctions they once enjoyed. And even the police, whose power depends solely on the belief in their omnipotence, become powerless in the face of social pressure, and the fear of those who have lived by sowing fear becomes greater than the fear of the persecuted.

Bureaucratic socialism has lost its ideological base. Despite all its monstrosities, the Stalinist apparatus, at least in the countries of the people's democracies, was much more dependent on ideology than the present ones. It might seem that an apparatus based on cynicism — which measures the accomplishments of socialism by its own privileges — is more effective, for it is free of ideological baggage, safe from ideological conflicts, capable of spontaneous and rapid changes, and more suited to manipulation. But this is less than half the truth. For such an apparatus is not only less reliable in moments of crisis,

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and more likely to disintegrate through cliquishness, but it is in itself a symptom of the withering away of the system it serves. A system that is not defended selflessly by anyone is a system condemned — I quote from Victor Serge's book about the Czarist Okhrana, though no policeman will believe this until he loses his power. Despotic socialism dies the slow death described by Hegel; it only seems to be intact, while drowning slowly in boredom and inertia, relieved only by a universal fear in which everyone is afraid of everyone else, with fear expressing itself in aggression. The loss of the "idea" is, for such a system, a loss of raison d'être. As an illustration, let us recall certain rhetorical changes: Stalin was always talking about "freedom" while his empire was full of torture and murder; today, when murder has ceased, the very sound of the word "freedom" brings the whole police apparatus to attention. Such old-fashioned words as "freedom," "independence," "law," "justice," "truth" are a threat to bureaucratic tyranny. (The international communist movement, the very idea of communism, has ceased to exist.) Everything valuable and permanent in the culture is created despite the system.

It is probable that, given a free choice, a majority of Polish workers and intellectuals would declare themselves for socialism, as I do — that is, for a sovereign national organism in which society controls the use and development of the means of production, the distribution of national wealth, and the administrative and political apparatus; for an organism which allows freedom of information, political pluralism, the multiformity of social wealth, respect for truth, competence and the public interest, freedom of professional organization, fredom from the arbitrariness of the political police, and which has a criminal code whose aim is to protect society from antisocial behavior and not to make criminals out of the entire citizenry.

The degree to which the development of such a society is possible depends, in large measure, though not exclusively, on the faith that society has in the possibility of attaining it. What society is depends *in part* on what it thinks it is. Hence social changes do not spring from material conditions alone, they require a conscious belief in their possibility. Thus, in the despotic socialist countries those who can be the carriers of hope are, at the same time, the initiators of a movement which makes that hope real.

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The idea that the present form of socialism is absolutely rigid and can be destroyed only at one blow, and that partial changes constitute, in effect, no change at all, can easily be used to justify opportunism and downright swinishness. For if the system is totally rigid, no individual or collective effort against the monstrosities of neo-Stalinist bureaucracy, no struggle to preserve a respect for truth, competence, decency, justice, and reason, is of any significance; and every form of swinishness is seen as part of the universal swinishness of the system. The thesis of *nonreformability* can then be used as a pardon granted in advance to any act of cowardice, passivity, and collaboration with evil. The fact that a large part of Poland's intelligentsia has let itself be persuaded of the nonelasticity of the system largely accounts for its passivity during the uprising of Polish workers in December 1970.

The greatest disservice that can be done to the cause of Polish independence and democracy is to perpetuate the traditional nationalist anti-Russian stereotypes. Despite the risk involved in inciting the various nationalisms within the Soviet "sphere of influence," they are an indispensable instrument for maintaining the status quo, particularly in the absence of an international ideology. Hence Polish anti–Russian nationalism simply contributes to the strengthening of Russian nationalism, and helps perpetuate the slavery of both nations.

Despite the threat of Soviet power and the actual invasion of Czechoslovakia, the centrifugal tendencies within the "bloc" cannot be contained; the corrosive forces of nationalism will go on eating away at an organism without ideological cohesion. But a disintegration fueled by national antagonisms may end in an apocalyptic massacre. If we can counteract this frightening prospect, it is only by returning to the traditional, old-fashioned idea of brotherhood among nations.

(*Translated from the Polish by Gustaw Linke*)

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is a shortened version of the original manuscript which appeared in* New Politics, *Fall 1971, and was published, in Polish, in* Monthly Review Kaltura, *June 1971.*

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# STORIES

## Raymond Federman

## ON JAZZ

[remembering Charlie Parker or how to get it out of your system]

X X X X X X X X X X ?
Ah! You guys want to talk about jazz!
You guys want me to tell you what I know about jazz?
Well, today, what I miss the most, it's my old jazz collection. What a treasure it was. Even though it was all 78s. Mostly BE-BOP because in those days, that's what jazz GREAT JAZZ (the great days you can't deny that) was. All the Charlie Parker, all the Dizzy, Miles, Prez, and also Dexter Gordon, and some Wardell Gray. Wow did I like did I love that guy. The big mouth of the tenor. I was a real nut a real fanatic of the sax. (Ah! you guys too! that's nice!) Yes, but me I lived that stuff from the inside (in DETROIT) with all of these cats who were revolutionizing jazz in 47, 48, 49. Yes I've known them all. We were buddies. No kidding! In Detroit especially and also New York. Yes, I played a little myself, the tenor sax. And not that bad. (No! no more! finished now!) All 78s! Alto sax also. The one I regret the most was the record where Parker blows his famous solo, that unbelievable solo, on LOVER MAN. That was the day he collapsed, passed out on stage, fell down like a bag of sawdust. Loaded! Looped! Gone! Yes it was during a concert toward the end of the solo (alto of course). Could not even finish his solo. But towards the end, WOW, does it move. Unbelievable! Cries! Screams out of his guts. Like a bag of sawdust he dropped!
A real madness!
I had that one! Yes, in 78. The original.

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(Ah! they have brought it out again? No, I didn't know) yes, but mine it was all scratched up I'd played it so much. And there was even a little piece broken just at the beginning. But I didn't give a damn because that one I knew literally by heart. Forward and backward. From beginning to end.

LOVER MAN **** TA-TA-TAAAAA ****
TATATA-TAAAAAA **** ta-ta ****
Ta- a -ta-tatattaaa
ta-aa-ta **** TREMENDOUS! ****

Gentlemen JAZZ you can't imagine how it was
how it was
what it was
what it was to have lived it
as I did
from the inside!

To have been part of it — in 47 in 48 in 49 — the great moments of BE-BOP — progressive jazz!
Yes, ME, I was there. I knew them all. And you must have known these guys to understand to know how much that stuff was eating them up down in there, in the GUTS. All my buddies (in DETROIT) were jazz musicians. All of them tremendous musicians. They had that in their skin.

Of course they were all black. There's not a single bright light who can — as far as I know — blow real jazz. NOT ONE!
BRIGHT LIGHT — ! — BULLSHIT — ! — 906 906 906 906 906
(o) (o) (o) (o) (o)

— — — — — — — — — — — — — —

In 47 in 48 in 49 I would make deals with my buddies :
a bright light
for a shade —
in fact, that's how I discovered AMERICA: in the dark!

x x x x x x x x ?

Ah! You guys want to know if they screw well!
(Bunch of perverts!)

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Ah! You guys would like to know how well they fuck!

No! Gentlemen, they do not have a funny smell!

Yes! They screw like hell! And beautiful bodies! Skin smooth like the skin of a baby lamb! And teats juicy like grapefruits, and asses (ah! the succulent asses of my cute little black chicks!) round solid well balanced on magnificent thighs!

Yes! Gentlemen . . . but I skip all that . . . or else . . .

No! There's not a single bright light who can blow (or fuck) like them not a single one not even a guy like Stan Getz and he's not bad on tenor not even Mulligan not even Bill Evans and yet that one knows his stuff . . . not one who can keep up with my buddies. These cats these white cats it's all cute stuff cool stuff that doesn't swing like my buddies. OK it's full of ideas sweet ideas but ideas come from the brains not from the guts and it's from the stomach — FROM THE GUTS . . . MAN! and not from the brains that the real stuff real jazz comes out! Just listen to Lester Young to Miles to Trane yes listen to Monk then you hear the guts squeaking crying bursting!

I'm not saying that you have to be an expert. That you have to know every thing. That you have to have studied music or even discography. All I am saying is that you have to have that in your belly. You see, even me, and yet I lived with them, for years and years (IN THE DARK), I couldn't stand up to them, couldn't make it!

But you guys, have you ever spent a night, yes an entire night with Charlie Parker, with Bird loaded like a donkey, doped up like a camel or a dromedary whichever you prefer, exhausted like a bull who just screwed a whole herd a pack of cows but still BLOWING HIS BRAINS OUT! Yes an entire night, in a little filthy garage, in Detroit, towards the end of the 40s, in 1949, to be exact, when Parker was the king of jazz!

I remember
it was after a concert — JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC!
There was
Fats Navarro Kenny Clarke Duke Jordon Tommy Potter & Bird of course

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And all kinds of other cool cats!
We all met at Frank's pad (in his garage) after the concert. But first we all went to the BLUE BIRD (on the Westside). They were all there: Fats
Duke
Kenny
Tommy
& Bird (of course) and then Wardell Gray came in! What a jam session
One of those historical moments! No question about that!

Me, I was lugging my big black case with my tenor sax inside (a COHN). Parker hadn't brought his alto.
He had left it at the hotel he explained.
I didn't dare play my usual solos. No, I didn't dare that night even when Frank shouted to me above the yellow smoke of cigarettes and pot:

> EH FRENCHY COME AND BLOW WITH US MAN COME ON MAN BLOW YOUR HORN WITH US IT'S CRAZY MAN no

I didn't dare!

It was all new, brand new, my tenor; I had bought it with the money I had saved during the summer, working as a waiter in a country club, in the CAT SKILLS; this was now winter, and what a disgusting winter the winter 1949!

I was getting quite good on my tenor, after only a few months, but I would practice a good ten to twelve hours a day, in the bathroom because it was better for the sonority; in those days I was living with a Hungarian family, just a room with kitchen privileges, it was not a bad place, especially since they were never there the Hungarians, so I took advantage of the bathroom, sometimes all night long . . . EH MAN CAN I BLOW YOUR HORN? . . .

It was Parker who asked me that! He was standing next to me lost in the big crowd and the cigarette smoke and it was as though GOD

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himself had come down on Earth to kiss me on the brow at the very moment when I felt so shitty yes so pissy because I didn't have the guts to blow my usual solos that evening!

I almost fainted on the spot in front of everybody but I held back because I was with a cute little broad. Rita!

RITA was her name! The one I was screwing at that time. A real nice girl who taught me a great deal about the secrets of love. Enormous teats she had. But when Parker asked me if he could blow my horn I didn't know . . . I didn't know what to do . . . what to say . . . what to!
Yes, I suppose that's what glory is! Glory and Pride and Friendship and Love! It must have been at that precise moment that I understood for the first time, and perhaps for the last time, that all men are equal and that NEVER yes NEVER a man should (I didn't say that but I must have thought about it) should kneel in front of another man NEVER but here at this very moment in front of Parker, his hand still touching my elbow, I almost, yes almost felt like kneeling like flattening myself down on the ground to kiss his feet . . . YES i said . . . YES OF COURSE . . . MAN in a kind of choked-up sob!

Have you ever heard Parker blow the tenor?
Yes . . .! of course, it's true, they've reissued some of these where you hear him on tenor, but that night, that night he played a solo A SOLO that lasted 45 — yes 45 — minutes ON MY SAXOPHONE! Can you imagine that!

45 MINUTES!

Just the piano (Duke) the bass (Tommy) and Kenny at the drums — behind him!

Everybody in the place sat down!
not a word!
not a movement!
Just the cigarette smoke!
I swear there were guys in the place with tears running down their faces!

A 45 MINUTE SOLO!

A HISTORICAL MOMENT (on My Old Flame)

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It was during the winter 1949 (and what a disgusting winter)!
I did not wipe my MOUTHPIECE for three weeks after that!
After that when they closed the joint around three in the morning all of us went back to Frank's garage on the Eastside and it went on until about six in the morning an unbelievable jam session all the guys played even me finally three or four solos with my tenor and at one point Parker tapped me on the shoulder in a kind of EH CRAZY MAN congratulatory gesture after I played a tremendous solo a flight of twelve bars on ORNITHOLOGY a tremendous improvisation that came out of me just like that I don't know how or from where all at once but it came out and all the cats were screaming at me BLOW FRENCHY BLOW and so I blew I blew beyond my possibilities my capacities beyond the limits of my dexterity and flew like a bird into musical zones unknown to me until then virgin regions that I couldn't believe existed and suddenly I switched key from a major sharp to a minor flat and let out a stream of chromatic scales an incredible burst as though I was weeping and laughing at the same time in my saxophone blowing my lungs and my heart into it I felt everything cracking inside of me my blood rushing to my head when finally I stopped and wiped my lips with my sleeve there was some blood mixed with the sweat there on my sleeve and it was then out of nowhere that I felt Parker's hand on my shoulder I almost wept

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Had I fallen dead on the spot right then I wouldn't have cared at all I had reached once and for all the summit (summit of summits) summit which no doubt I would never reach again NEVER again but I had played I had finally succeeded in playing my one great solo I had made it and I had played it especially for Parker for Charlie but also for all my other buddies for all those who were shouting BLOW FRENCHY BLOW because they understood that I was blowing fire and flames for them for all the shit that life throws at you that I was blowing because me too I was hurting inside like them there in the guts and because there were so many things we wanted ah so many things we wanted to say but which never came out except once in a while in the sound of jazz in the breath and the cry of jazz in the loneliness and the freedom and

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the sweetness of jazz and I finally I had managed to speak to those dear brothers and sisters

Then
after that
we all went up to Ernie's pad for a wild collective jerking-off party and pot
But Parker and the other musicians of the Philharmonic didn't come up because they were too tired
(they explained)
They all went back to their hotel to sleep it off
It's normal since they were all exhausted
But the rest of the guys came
We were all quite excited

Everybody got undressed naked
[no! all the broads had left to go to bed either alone or else with the guys who made it with them]
I had a little complex (complex of inferiority) next to my black buddies because these guys had enor-MOUS dicks (at rest theirs was almost the dimension of mine in erection)
But we started masturbating in there with such vitality
with such frenzy
with such joy
with such insolence
that soon I no longer felt ashamed of my mediocre dimension
and I didn't think about anything except to keep up at all cost with all the others even if my ugly little thing was smaller than theirs
and I kept up
to the end
jerk after jerk (individual and collective) full speed and slow motion and we would pass our dicks to one another stiff jubilant happy juicy so that everyone would share the pleasure
WHAT WORK! WHAT FIREWORKS!
You guys may think I'm exaggerating but you should have seen the faces the twisted grimaces of joy the eyes bulging out the naked bodies tall black and shiny (except for mine which seemed out of place in there as it should be obvious but nobody cared) bouncing around and you should have heard the heavy breathing the little cries the groans the general exaltation!

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And as soon as a guy felt that it was coming, he would rush towards the middle of the room where a large porcelain plate had been placed on the floor on a little square carpet to unload, so that our sperms would mix without any prejudice, and suddenly one of the guys, a mad cat, high as you've never seen, picked up the plate and drank the whole mixture, the whole soup, to the last drop, without even stopping to take a breath of air, that's friendship for you I said to myself, everybody applauded in the midst of wild cries, a friend like that is hard to find, and he did appreciate our encouragements, you could see that in his eyes, and also in the way he stood up straight, but after this glorious, symbolic, and magnificent gesture I felt a little guilty, because it occurred to me I should have been the one to do that, after all I was the outsider here, in this noble gathering, but no one mentioned anything, no one realized my embarrassment, and so we all went back to work with even more fervor and more enthusiasm than before, little butts of pot were being passed, from lips to lips, and we would drag on them, slowly and deeply, let me tell you, however, that we were not smoking that stuff in order to take trips, no, or to escape, or to negate life, no ladies and gentlemen, on the contrary, it was to affirm life, it was strictly to get excited, to get it up, SEXUALLY, to solidify our hardons, and so after the guys had stopped applauding the guy who had emptied the plate, everybody went to work again, and it was a race to see who would come the fastest and the most profusely, there was one guy who kept score on a piece of paper in red ink, and each time a guy unloaded in the plate everybody shouted at his success without any sign of envy, I didn't do too badly, I ended up sixth on the grand total, in sixth place that is, which is not bad, not bad at all, if you consider that we were a good dozen that night, doing it individually or collectively, in Ernie's pad,

then everybody began to fall down on the floor to go to sleep, like angels, like babies rather, and we slept like that, naked, until about five or six in the afternoon and even later, and there were guys who slept while holding onto other guys' legs or arms, or even holding onto each other's penis, stretched next to each other, on the side, face to face, bodies sometimes folded, as in the fetal position, so that they could feel closer to one another

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And some guys were speaking in their sleep
and others were laughing in their sleep
and others singing in their sleep
— bla bla bla — qua qua qua — hop hop hop — ta ta ta — tra la la —
it was beautiful!
yes . . . we all had beautiful dreams in our heads . . . blue dreams . . .
like waves

**Sanford Chernoff**

## A MATTER OF TIME

I was down in the front row of Loew's Oriental, eating a chicken salad sandwich, when my father died. That's the way I remember it. And to this day, the thought of it makes me itch. Not that I believe for a minute that I would scratch any less if I had been somewhere else at the time. At the time there was no place else. Not for me. Not then. Then it was all the same to me. It was all chicken salad sandwiches, breast, and dreams. And death had no more part in those dreams than I had out of them.

I never looked in the coffin. We bear a resemblance I'm told, though I couldn't see it. Not yet. He was a small, hairless man in, as he liked to say, women's clothes. It was handbags actually, that he sold six days a week, in one of those avid little stores along Fourteenth Street. Sundays he slept late and, if my brother wasn't around, would catch with me behind the house. Ed was the talented one. He had pitched a two hitter his first year in high school, and my father said he was on his way. It was just a matter of time.

Less than a year after the funeral Ed enlisted in the coast guard. My mother didn't do anything to stop him. But she cried the night he left and drank so, I remember, I had to help her to bed. She wouldn't let me take off her shoes and, I recall, cursed me in the name of my father.

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She had always, for some reason, found trouble with my name. That didn't bother me. But she had a way, at times now, of not looking at me. I don't know how else I can describe it. We might be talking or whatever, and suddenly her eyes would narrow and appear to turn on something inside her. It was then as if she were not there. And yet it was not so much her I felt out of reach then, but myself.

About the time we moved that spring, I had a letter from my brother. He was sorry, he said, but as much as I went over that letter, I couldn't figure out what he was sorry for. I wrote and asked him but he never answered me. I went on writing though. I wrote him about the apartment and the work mother had begun taking in. She sewed ornaments on dresses. I would pick them up for her. The shop was one of a number I had to pass on my way from school anyway. It had been a drug store before that, and another, a few blocks south, still had a barber's pole outside. They were blunt, impatient places. But I liked them. I liked the closeness, the noise, and the open way the girls walked around. I used to wonder about those girls and what went on behind the painted glass of those store fronts. One of the guys in the old neighborhood claimed that they were places where ladies who weren't married went to have their babies. I tried to tell them, whenever I got around there, what it was really like. But they seemed not to want to know. Or maybe it was not something they could know. Anyway I stopped trying. And finally, I stopped going back. There were things that had to be done and, after all, some distance now between us.

For a while then, there were nights I would wake to voices and a bed unfamiliar to me. Once I screamed and they laughed at me. The man lived in the apartment below ours. He had no thumb and was always trying to get me to box with him. He came with eight-ounce gloves for me once, and my mother got sore when I refused them. She sent me to my room. And later she came in and said that it was not him I had refused but her. "Don't you see that?" She came to the edge of the bed, where I was, and asked me to go in and accept the gloves. "For me," she said, "take it for me." It was for her, I tried to explain, that I couldn't.

It was summer before she was talking to me again. She was fat by then. You wouldn't believe all the weight that woman put on. She couldn't get into any of her clothes and went around in a house-

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coat that, with the heat, stuck crudely to her. Her handkerchief and glass were always about her. I would empty it, whenever I could, but it didn't seem to do much good. More and more often, I would come home and find her asleep in the chair I had left her in, without so much as the station of her radio changed. Then I would be sent with notes to the shop. The last of these was not even read. There was nothing for her, I was to say. But I couldn't. I didn't know how. I thought about it all the way home and then turned around and went back. And there I stood, just stood, until I was asked what it was I wanted. For a minute then, I didn't know myself. "A job," it came to me finally and in a voice, I recall, all but drowned out by the machines.

With the first of my pay I brought two of their dresses and took them home for her to work on. Those dresses, the same two, my mother was to do over and over again. And what she did, I would have Sophie, one of the girls at the shop, undo for me. "Impossible," was Sophie's word for it. It made no sense to her. But she never questioned me, or would she take anything I offered her for it. If I wanted to do something, she did say once, I could take her out somewhere.

"Where?"

"Anywhere." Sophie made great use of her hands when she spoke. And I followed their every move in the hope of some further meaning to what was going on. She suggested a picnic. "We can rent one of those boats they have. You know. And I'll bring the radio and sandwiches. What do you like?"

"Anything," I said, "but chicken salad."

As it turned out though, it was no day for a picnic. It was Sophie's idea that we go to a movie. I didn't care one way or the other, but said that I had seen the one at Loew's. She wore heels and had done something about the little holes that picked at her face. But her smell, I noticed right away, was what it always was. It was not just a smell. Sophie's was more a combination than any one smell. It was ripe tomatoes, gum, and damp upholstery, cigarettes, age, and toilet water. In the theater it was worse. Her odor seemed to blossom there and thicken so with each breath that, after a time, it was as if I had never known anything else. That's when I kept getting up and going out to the lounge. "You don't know what you're

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missing," Sophie whispered upon one of my returns and, leaning even closer, told me not to worry. She would, she said, tell me what it was all about later. And she did, the minute we got out on the street. "I figured he was the one right from the beginning. There was something about him. And then when they asked him if he had ever worked with animals. . . ." It had rained while we were inside, and the evening was left with a shine and what seemed to me a very personal breeze. "Five-three they say he is. Would you believe it? Five-three. They never show you his feet if you notice. . . ." On a wet street the cars have a hum to them, a voice almost, if you listen in a certain way. I do. I listen but it fades always just as I am about to hear. . . . "Impossible. That part when she goes to wait at the mine. I thought I'd die when he didn't come up with the others. The way she looked then. She's got to get some kind of award. I was in tears. For that alone she deserves it. That look alone. I had to keep telling myself it wasn't really happening. You ever have to do that?"

"What?" I hadn't been listening.

"Tell yourself it's not happening," she repeated impatiently. "It's not real."

I was watching her hands. Like hampered birds, they tore desperately at the night about her. "It's the only thing that saves me," she went on without waiting for what I had to say. "I'd be walking around in tears half my life if I didn't. I'm a very sentimental person. You're not though, are you."

I didn't know what I was, I said.

"You must. I mean, you either are or you're not." She was laughing and had turned the palms of her hands up suddenly, as though I, in some way, were responsible for their emptiness.

"You all right?"

I had started to look away but her question, coming as it did, held me there. "Of course," I answered quickly and with what I could make of a smile. "Why?"

"All that running you were doing before."

I tried to appear not to understand.

"In the movies. It's not your kidneys is it?"

My kidneys were fine, I said. We had turned off the avenue and, by this time, I should have known where we were headed. But I didn't. And I wouldn't, not for a while yet, not until we had

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stopped and I happened to turn to a window. It was always a window, now that I think of it. Whenever I came anywhere near the old neighborhood it was always a window that seemed to find me. . . .

"You don't have to tell me anything about kidneys. My father spent practically half his life in the toilet. What that man went through. Especially in the morning. He'd be in there a good half hour sometimes. Like a fire inside him he said it was. Can you imagine? A fire inside you." She shuddered and, in front of a garage door, a little further on, stopped and told me I could kiss her. But that was all, she added immediately, a threat to her tone. "Just so you don't get any funny ideas. If you know what I mean. . . ."

It was then that I turned and realized where I was. The window of a kitchen it was. Its hard, yellowing light burned monotonously on the night and those inside. A man and two women they looked to be from there. But as I watched, and my eyes became better adjusted, I say that what I thought was a man was just some clothes hung there, and that one of the women was actually a child. The other was old, an old woman with colored hair and a growth at her neck. She kept touching it and turning to the child. But the child never so much as looked her way. Her attention was fixed on what I guessed to be a door, on that side of the room which was invisible from where I stood. They seemed to be waiting for something from it. And I couldn't help feeling that it was not going to come, whatever it was, and that they knew it. Yet they waited, and I watched. I watched and presently, as I did, imagined myself being drawn, sucked with a force that I could do nothing against, into that light, their lives. My hand at that moment froze on the breast it had been given.

"What is it?" Sophie wanted to know.

"It's getting late."

"Is that all you can think of?" She pressed up tighter against me, but I still couldn't feel her. Not even her smell reached me anymore. She had blurred with the light and was now no more real than I was. "Move," she insisted, prodding me with her thighs. "Let yourself go."

I couldn't. If I could I would have run. I would have run until the life went out of my legs, and I had all I could do to breathe.

"You're not some kind of queer, are you?"

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Am I? And the window now — had I turned to it or had it turned to me? Had it always been so turned? And so turned, it faced me now with all the aborted, stunned expressions which I had foolishly believed, all this time, to have gotten away with.

"Open your eyes at least, for Christ sake."

That was the last I saw of Sophie. There was of course, still the shop. But even there, since I no longer went to her with those dresses of my mother's, we seldom came together. And then, there was little left to say. The dresses gave me some trouble. It was fall in fact, before I really got the hang of undoing them. Though by then, it hardly mattered. I was back in school and limited now to the hours I could put in at the shop. It was business, I convinced my mother, but she swore that if it didn't pick up by the end of the month she was going out and find work elsewhere. I hadn't expected anything like this, and began to hope. But the end of the month came and another began without her setting foot out of the house. The weather was not what she thought it should have been and, she reasoned, things would probably be no better for her wherever she went.

Around that time, if my memory serves me right, I began scratching. I would scratch myself raw and not even come close to any kind of satisfaction. The more I scratched in fact, the more I itched. I would have done better to leave myself alone, but I couldn't. Whatever it was I was doing to myself seemed to me then less than I would have had to bear in not doing it. The day did come, however, when the clinic seemed the only way. I was put through all sorts of tests and prescribed something that was supposed to relieve me. And it did. It did everything they said it would, but only for short periods of time. So I never went anywhere without this bottle of it I took to carrying. It saw me through the day, and I was even managing some sleep now. I still woke in shreds, though found it hard to believe now that it was all my own doing.

I looked like someone that had just been through a battle, I was told, the following Thursday at the clinic, and that the tests had shown nothing. "I wouldn't worry about it. In itself that's something." They wanted me to stay on at the hospital for observation. "Just for a couple of days. We want to get a real look at you. It won't cost you anything."

I appreciated that, I said, but still didn't see how I could.

"It's not going to get any better itself you know."

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I knew. And how I knew. "Maybe another time."

"Another time. I don't think you realize just how bad this condition of yours really is."

Neither did they, I pointed out, and could see at once that that was not what was expected of me.

"It's entirely up to you of course. We can only offer our help."

I understood, had thanked them and was out the door before it occurred to me that I had forgotten about my prescription. They renewed it for me but made it plain that thereafter I would have to have it taken care of somewhere else.

The fourth day out of my prescription I went down to the drugstore and tried to talk to the man. He wouldn't listen, but did his best to sell me something for the infection that had developed just under my left eye. There were days when I could barely keep it open. But the eye didn't worry me as much as what I had spreading around my leg. I walked with a limp now, and had lost a good deal of hair. To the crown, practically. I was little more than scalp. I would not be seen anymore without a hat and did what I could, especially around those I knew, about my limp. Still there was always something for them to say.

Even my brother, passing through one night, remarked that he wouldn't have known me on the street. I, on the other hand, would have known him anywhere. The uniform had done none of the things I had imagined it would for him. And short hair and all, it was as if I had never seen him any other way. But then, I never have been able to see Ed in any way other than he was at the moment. And in that sense, for me, I don't suppose he ever really was. Only now — with mother having stepped out, as she did for a minute, and we were left to ourselves — was I even aware of what he was saying. And it was not so much anything that was, or was not, being said but his voice, his use of it, that took my notice. He spoke rapidly, without facing me, and so loud you wouldn't have thought that it was just me there he had to reach. About the food he had to put up with, it was, and then his arm. He had pitched at least once out there, the way I understood it, and it hadn't gone too well. "I had nothing. Nothing," he repeated, turning to the door mother was just know what I expected — going in cold like that. I deserved it. I deserved everything I got. Four innings. It was like a lifetime. I had nothing. Nothing," he repeated, turning to the door mother was just

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coming through. With her she had the man from the apartment below and a bottle. It looked like she already had had a few. Her hair, for one thing, had come undone and fell comically down one side. Then there was all this talking she did. And before long, she was trying to get into one of her old dresses. For a minute there I thought it was one of those from the shop and worried what I would do if she tore it or something. I would, I decided, do just what I was doing. The dress had little to do with it really and, watching her struggle with it, I cared little now one way or the other. She somehow managed to work the dress down over one breast. But there she was stuck with it. She could neither squeeze any further into or out of the dress. The effort brought her color up and there was this distorted, yet anything but comic, look to her now. And she was quiet, thoroughly quiet, now that the struggle was over with, if only for the moment. Then she had to dance, she said, and sent the man down for his phonograph. He returned with his boxing gloves as well, and tried to get my brother to put them on with him. He didn't have the time, he had a train to catch, Ed kept saying in that loud way of his. And once more the phonograph repeated, "It had to be you." It was the third time. My leg was acting up but she wouldn't let me stop dancing. "We're just getting started," she sang, her breath short and timeless by my ear. Once or twice I tried to get that side of her hair back up where it belonged, but it wouldn't stay. It ran like dust from my hand. She dipped again, one of her fancy dips and, over her shoulder, I saw us in the mirror. It was unbelievable. I looked the older and, if not for the hat, the image of my father. And it struck me then that it was him she was dancing with, holding to. "You're all over me. Don't you hear the damned music?" I closed my eyes the next time around the mirror. But it was worse that way. I saw more that way. Something fell then. It was behind us and, from the sound of it, I expected to find something more than just the man there. But there he was flat on his back, his mouth cut and smiling. "Sweet," was his first word and it was unmistakably for my brother, standing there above him, unlacing a glove with his teeth. "Don't apologize. It was beautiful. I can't remember the last time I was hooked like that. Sweet. The way you threw it. So nice and easy. Like it was nothing. Like you had nothing behind it. Where did it all come from?"

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I thought she was laughing at first. For what or who she cried I couldn't tell. It could have been for any or all of us. It could have been for none of us. It could have been the liquor or even my dancing. I don't know. And I don't know that I even want to know anymore. She had to be taken in to bed finally. My brother gave me a hand, though I told him I could have managed her alone.

I probably would have been better off alone. We had trouble getting through the bedroom door with her and then he had her shoes off before I could do anything about it. She cursed and kicked at the bedclothes.

"She always like this?"

"She doesn't like having her shoes taken from her."

"Her shoes," he repeated, and held the one he still had up to what light there was in the room. The shoe glistened and in the next instant, with the turn of his hand, was in shadow. "You think they'll ever come back?" And when I didn't answer, "Open toes I'm talking about."

"I know. What time does that train of yours leave?"

"I have a minute. He's driving me to the station. Decent of him after the way I clipped him. I don't know what got into me. I could have hurt the man."

The language from the bed, at that moment, seemed to flare.

"We can't just leave her like this."

"Like what?"

"Look at her." He was no longer whispering. "She doesn't stop. It's not enough. I get the feeling that there's something we should be doing for her that we're not."

I got no such feeling. There was nothing more I could do for her, but I did feel now, something for him. I assured him that she was all right, and reminded him again of his train.

"You're sure? You don't need me?"

"I'm sure."

Then came that moment when there was nothing left to say, and there was only the sound from her bed between us. "I better run," he said at last. He had difficulty with the door I remember. And I remember the quiet and thinking, as I sat scratching there on the edge of her unlit bed, of the long way he had to go. . . .

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Barbara Rose

# PAINTING TODAY

Ten years ago when I started writing art criticism, opinions might differ about what was good and what was bad, but there was still a consensus regarding what constituted "painting," or at least serious painting. That consensus has fairly well dissolved and critics are reluctant to generalize or to discuss more than the work of an individual artist. Because painting today is besieged from many quarters — new media and materials, commercial art, craft techniques, and hybrid forms marrying painting with any number of other arts and even sciences — it appears that there is in fact no focus for critical dialogue.

The situation is further confused by the aspiration of artists to transcend the traditional limits of pictorial art, even while remaining nominally painters. Innovation still seems the way to make one's mark; yet ground-breaking innovation appears increasingly difficult as abstract art becomes a mature discipline with a history that is more or less understood — indeed understanding that history is a prerequisite to making any contribution to it at this late date. Despite the possibility that no new major "breakthrough" may be open to abstract art — that personal variations and individual sensibility may be the future of abstraction — the public continues to respond to a look of newness more than it responds to anything else. The result is a certain desperation to produce, if not a radical art, then at least an obviously "new look," especially among younger painters.

Lacking any specific focus, the heirs of the New York School are experiencing difficulty in isolating relevant questions (let alone finding new answers) germane to painting fifty years after the Cubists attacked the function of painting as solely a representational art. Al-

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though Cubism was not abstract art, it pointed the way to a pure art purged of everything that tied painting to representation. The aim of post-Cubist abstraction has been to expunge the vestiges of representation. This process has been gradual; and there have been many setbacks, since the urge to regress to more comfortable and familiar modes of realism is always seductive in insecure times. Today the "call to order" is strong in all areas; in art it expresses itself in the sudden popularity of the various realist and Neo-realist styles filling the galleries and museums with updated versions of the American Scene. Most of this work is just provincial, academic painting in a nostalgic vein reminiscent at its best of Edward Hopper. Some of it — the gleaming neon signs, fetishistic motorcycles and pornographic close-ups of ladies behinds, is simply commercial art appealing to the lowest level of popular taste.

While these regressive tendencies earn praise from the self–appointed guardians of Western culture repeatedly sounding the death knell of the avant-garde, abstract art does not stand still. In fact it seems to have gained a second wind recently, and many painters are slowly evolving new painterly, romantic styles in opposition to the strict, cerebral reductivism of the art of the sixties. These new styles however continue in the direction of creating an abstract art as purified as possible of any elements that tied Cubism to earlier representational art.

Because Cubism continued to deploy silhouetted shapes against a background, it remained bound to the conventions of representing figures in a room or landscape. But Cubism made no pretense of being independent of representation, no matter how closely it bordered on becoming a purely abstract style. What also emerges now, however, is that the Cubist-derived geometric styles, which called themselves "nonobjective" to hail their divorce from representation, were hardly freer than Cubism of the traditional conception of pictorial space as a series of planes parallel to the picture plane. For no matter how compressed and flattened space became in Cubism and its offshoots, the presence of positive shapes contrasted with a negative area surrounding them necessarily evoked Renaissance illusionism.

This issue was commented on, if not resolved, in pop art, which examined the relationship of representation to reproduction in novel

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ways. Pop artists felt free to use representation, which abstract art had rejected, because they took their subjects from reproductions — printed images that immediately identify themselves as flat, and as having only one property, that of *surface*. During the sixties, pseudo-representational styles based on reproductive techniques, as well as images derived from reproductions, were used by pop artists. For example, Roy Lichtenstein created a cartoon style simulating the printed image; and Andy Warhol developed a method for transferring silk-screened images to canvas that combined representation with reproduction.

Although most pop art is little more than banal commentary on the pervasiveness of popular imagery, Lichtenstein's and Warhol's painting is particularly sophisticated because it simultaneously acknowledges that reproduction has usurped the mimetic function of painting, while representing images in the terms familiarly associated with reproduction. The most thorough as well as the most profound examination of the relationship of representation to reproduction, however, is the extensive rumination on the subject that constitutes the complex iconography of Jasper Johns's paintings, drawings, sculpture, and prints. Continuing to explore, in a linked series of methodical transformations of context, technique and association, the relationship of depiction to representation, of the literal to the illusory, Johns refuses to take the position that any art — even abstract art — has completely disembarrassed itself of the vestiges of pictorial representation binding modern art to its past.

Johns is certainly correct that the situation is not so simple as it seems. For the most part, the painting of the New York School that called itself "abstract" was still conceptually wed to traditional means of depicting the figure is space. Johns made a punning reference to this fact in his 1955 *Figure 1*, a painting of the numeral one in white imbedded in a "field" of white that served as an analogy for landscape. Unlike the human figure, however, the numeral one has only a single surface, so that no matter how traditional Johns's impressionist technique, the "figure" one remained flat, contiguous with the surface on which it was depicted.

As usual, Johns anticipated things to come. The central problem of the sixties was the establishment of a post-Cubist style of abstraction no longer indebted to Renaissance modes of depiction and

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illusionism. Shaped paintings resolved the problem of foreground vs. background relationships by discarding the background altogether, cutting out the image so that the entire canvas was identical with the whole of the image. Both Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly used this means of causing depicted shape to coincide with literal shape. After 1966, however, Stella combined shapes depicted within the canvas together with the literal shape of the eccentric canvas cut-out, introducing an unexpected element of illusionism.

Another alternative to creating Cubist planes and shapes was popularized by Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, and Morris Louis in the technique of staining paint into raw, unprimed canvas. Sinking the image directly into the support, staining identified the figure with its ground so that the spatial illusion created was not related to Cubist space but to the more ambiguous atmospheric space of the color-field painting of Rothko and Newman.

The question of what liberated Newman and Rothko from Cubism becomes more pressing as their liberation assumes increasing significance for current painting. Now that we have had another chance to see both Matisse and Miró once again in recent retrospectives, the answer becomes clearer. Matisse's high key color, and Miró's conception of space as an indeterminate continuum are the obvious sources for the post-Cubist style of color abstraction that remains dominant in present day American art. However, we must remember that Matisse remained a representational artist, no matter how radically he reformulated the canons of representation. Miró on the other hand — especially in the paintings of the late twenties shown recently at the Guggenheim Museum — could be amazingly free of figural referents. The experience Miró had that Matisse did not was of course Surrealism.

Fashionable as it still is in New York to deny that Surrealism had other than literary importance, it seems time to admit that Surrealism rather than Cubism was the key to the emergence of an art whose conception of space and figuration were not still bound to traditional models.

For Surrealist space, at least as it was developed by Miró, is open, expansive, indeterminate, as opposed to the closed, finite, restrictive space of Cubism with its layered planes and silhouetted shapes. Surrealist space is a continuum as fluid as the thought process

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involved in the technique of free association that inspired Surrealist automatism. Certainly it is no accident that the discovery of the unconscious, as well as man's initial experiences in exploring atmospheric space, coincided with the conceptualization of a new kind of pictorial space that is both continuous and unbounded.

Miró's contribution to current painting is inestimable. Part of the distortion and confusion of the present situation is the irony that while New York fashion, smugly complacent in the success of American art abroad, elevates petty novelties, the eighty-year-old Miró serenely continues to paint pictures that will count as much for our time as they did for the twenties. It has been obvious for some time that Miró's simplification of painting into an empty, open field of subtly modulated color decisively affected New York painting. Today, however, another aspect of Miró's works of the twenties has assumed prominence. For the primary role Miró assigned to drawing as a space-creating inflection, as opposed to a shape-enclosing contour (its traditional function) is at this moment a central issue in painting.

Drawing, used as an independent element in opposition to its traditional role of bounding and defining color areas as shapes, first appears in the works of Kandinsky and Klee, who were surely important influences on Miró. But Miró detaches line from color and shape more completely than they. Using line to cut throug hspace, Miró suggests depth without communicating sufficient visual information to complete an illusion of the third dimension. Miró's drawing is unprecedented because of its exclusively space creating function; for in Kandinsky and Klee's works drawing remains surface markings that do not penetrate deep space. This is truer of course for Klee — whose drawing resembles a kind of graphic overlay — than for Kandinsky. In Miró's Surrealist paintings, however, automatic drawing pierces the field, often recalling perspective illusions set as an angle to the picture plane. Converging and backward curving lines are used by Miró to accentuate spatial ambiguity; they evoke but do not establish references to foreshortening and the sensation of depth created by perspective.

Miró's shifting space differs from the strict formality of the Cubist grid, which requires each successive plane to line up, no matter how telescoped their order, with the picture plane. In compari-

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son with Cubism, Miró's intercalations of flat shapes, lying on the surface or parallel to the surface, with lines that twist and curve, reaching back into depth, was an extraordinary invention.

Today we see a special emphasis placed on drawing that inflects space rather than depicting shapes in the recent paintings of Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, Richard Diebenkorn, Al Held, Jack Tworkov, Robert Motherwell, and Jules Olitski, not to mention their legion of younger imitators. The importance of drawing is particularly dramatic when compared with its absence in the painting of the sixties, a decade during which drawing was virtually abandoned as a hindrance to the impact of a more intense color experience. Because of the desire for immediacy, drawing was prohibited from playing an important role in the sixties, since drawing creates complicated detail that impedes the instantaneous visual perception of an image.

One may assign various interpretations to the goal of instantaneous impact characteristic of American painting in the sixties. Certainly it was a decade in which any kind of delayed gratification — whether in life or in art — appeared anathema. The "now" took such precedence over all other considerations that a statement of presentness became the primary aesthetic objective: Freedom Now, Paradise Now, See It Now — these were the slogans of the sixties. The mood of the seventies is intensely different; the feeling that the future is in our grasp has given way to new sense of extended time as the general rate of change in all areas has slowed. This reflects itself in painting as a reaction against the minimal, simplifying reductiveness, crisp, easily legible striped bands, and familiar geometry of the sixties in favor of greater complexity of both image and illusion. Both the new painterliness, another detail creating an impact-reducing feature, as well as the fresh interest in drawing as a way of adding visual incident, are characteristic of the reaction against the extremes of flatness and simplification characteristic of the sixties.

As an example of the way painters are using drawing to increase spatial ambiguity, one may cite Robert Motherwell's "Open" series of paintings. In these recent generally monochromatic paintings, Motherwell frequently draws an incomplete rectangular figure within a modulated color field, which suggests infinite space, while the drawing simultaneously asserts flatness because it locates the plane

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of the surface. In other examples of the "Open" series, the direct calligraphy of Zen brush drawings is recalled, not in the sense of Kline's enlarged ideograms, but as kinds of marks to establish space within a color field. In fact, the "Open" series completes Motherwell's conversion from an "action" or gestural painter to a more contemplative artist whose chromatic field paintings have greater analogies with Newman and Rothko than with Pollock and de Kooning.

Richard Diebenkorn's return to abstraction after a decade of painting the figure is a welcome addition to the dwindling ranks of mature American artists. His new abstract paintings, among his finest, are no longer compromised by an unresolved conflict between the abstract and the representational. Although Diebenkorn's spatial divisions into separate planes link him more closely to Cubism than to color-field painting, his horizontal and vertical lines reiterate the frame in the manner of Motherwell and Noland, and acknowledge the importance of structure in recent abstract art.

Kenneth Noland's current image of interwoven horizontal and vertical lines is a revision of his wide horizontal bands of the late sixties, sliced thin now and spread out with areas of open fields between them. Combined with a subtler, more muted palette and thinned-down pigment, these new paintings engage the eye, inviting sustained contemplation, as opposed to creating an optical flash so bright vision sought repose elsewhere than on the surface of his dazzling canvases. The combination of vertical lines crossing and weaving in and out of horizontal bands together with Noland's new use of a transparent as opposed to an opaque medium has considerably augmented detail and complexity in his new paintings, which are remarkable for the sensitive handling of surface as a fragile, delicately modulated field of variable saturation.

Noland's new paintings reflect, in their own terms, the general shift toward painterliness that characterizes the painting of the seventies. But painterliness in the seventies is not conceived as it was in the "action painting" of the fifties, in terms of visible brushstrokes recording animated physical gesture. The static painterliness of the seventies is rather a matter of a general softening of forms and fields, a looser technique, a more variable surface, and a renewed interest in detail of different kinds. One may trace the turn toward a new

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painterliness to the success of Helen Frankenthaler's Whitney Museum retrospective in 1969. Her show coincided with a general feeling that the reductiveness of minimal art and the simplified formats of the sixties, with their dry, intellectual logic, had run their course. Frankenthaler's sensibility was never at home with the extremes of bland emptiness and repetition of motifs of the impact painting fashionable in the sixties. Although she eliminated line per se after 1962, she continued to make the edges of her forms so irregular that they subsumed the detail creating function of drawing. She resisted the general use of symmetrical formats and familiar shapes that could be instantaneously perceived with a stubbornness not altogether appreciated at the time. The 1967 painting titled *The Human Edge* acknowledges her revulsion against "hard-edge" painting, the prevailing cold geometric style achieved through the precision of edges painted with masking tape. Currently drawing has resumed a crucial role in her paintings, which seems natural since she had used line so effectively in the fifties.

Frankenthaler's style seemed an alternative to the severely restrictive structural style of the sixties for many younger artists, who created an instant academy of stain painting, seized upon by museums desperate for a Nouvelle Vague, as "lyrical abstraction." Imitating Frankenthaler's freely spreading forms, improvisational approach, and stain technique, young painters were drawn to her nature imagery as well, which appeared a welcome relief from the emotionally detached, intellectual stringency of the sixties. However, it is obvious that none of Frankenthaler's young followers understood her work because of the speed with which they deserted "lyrical abstraction" once the vogue for Jules Olitski's version of painterliness — which emphasized thick paint as opposed to staining — began to attract the eye of critics and collectors. Although Olitski was staining dilute pigment in the early sixties, by the late sixties he had begun to build up a crust that called attention to surface as a material entity that took priority over any image.

Olitski's move toward emphasizing the literal qualities of surface as a film or crust of paint coincided with another reaction against stained painting that was yet more literal in its interpretation of the importance of surface. The emphasis on surface must be seen as part of the increasing identification of the actual, that is "real"

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properties of the materials and techniques involved in painting that has been characterized by the self-awareness augmenting with each evolution of modern consciousness. In recent American art, however, literalism has received some extreme formulations. Perhaps the most extreme form of literalism is the idea that it is necessary to reveal — for the interest of total candor — that a painting is really nothing but a piece of cloth. Taking the canvas off the stretcher and draping it around the room, or tacking it directly to the wall, some younger artists have attempted to extend the premises of stained painting in the direction of an even greater literalism regarding the fact that the support is just cloth and drawing is merely one kind of marking. To this category belong Robert Ryman's white paintings stapled directly to the wall, Sol Lewitt's marks made directly on the wall, as well as Sam Gilliam's stained canvases, casually draped and folded to create environments.

At this moment the move to take painting off its stretcher in an effort to further deprive it of any capacity to create an illusion of space is still very popular. The artist who has attracted the most attention with his sewn and appliqued painted banners is Alan Shields. In this genre, Shields's craft-oriented paintings, in which drawing becomes a literal sewn line of stitching, fulfill the demands of the counterculture ethos, playing right into the taste for patchwork quilts, primitive and folk tapestries, rugs, and wall hangings. Unfortunately, however, none of the craft-derived techniques for pursuing the implications of stain painting in the direction of anti-illusionistic literalism hold their own against a good Navajo rug, which says something about the quality of American Indian art, as well as about the impossibility of producing convincing home craft in an advanced technological society. Innocence, whether real or simulated, in the present context can only end up looking quaint or at best ingratiating.

In the most extreme formulations of literalism, the pragmatic spirit that finds any kind of illusionism an unconscionable fiction triumphs. Paintings and sculpture come dangerously close to becoming confused with ordinary objects in the world. In fact they came so close that the main problem in the seventies appears no longer the necessity to distinguish painting from the other arts, but the need to find ways of differentiating painting from other objects in the world.

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Jules Olitski's paintings are so compelling because he came up with a very persuasive solution to this problem: he asserted that painting is surface and surface alone. Because painting is the only kind of object that can have surface as its exclusive property, Olitski's emphasis on surface drew artists floundering around for some focus into his orbit. Certainly Olitski's aggressive insistence on surface as a physical, material entity is more sophisticated than removing the support from the stretcher, but the two must be seen as related attempts to redefine painting as simply surface.

Currently Olitski is the *chef d'ecole* of a school of heavily impastoed painting that includes Walter Darby Bannard, Dan Christensen, John Hoyland, Jack Bush, Larry Poons, and John Seery in its growing ranks. In the context of the soft absorbant ground of stained painting, Olitski's move to a hard, encrusted surface looked radical. Moreover, he had succeeded in creating a painterly style not dependent on the gestural brushstrokes of "action painting," but on the idea that impastoed color applied in varying densities was a sufficiently interesting visual experience in itself. This also looked radical.

The look of radicality in Olitski's case proves false, however, if one is aware of the antecedents of such a style. As sorting out the relationship between depicted or drawn shapes to literal or actually shaped canvas became more and more pressing for Stella, Noland, and Kelly, the really extreme move appeared to Olitski to banish shapes entirely. And he had precedents for doing so. They were Yves Klein's pancake thin monochrome blue paintings with their lumpy matière crusts, in which surface was emphasized to the exclusion of all else, and Dubuffet's *texturologies* and *meteorologies,* small oatmeal–colored paintings that imitated the real surfaces of walls and pavements while also stressing the physical characteristics of painting as a kind of surface. The theme of physical matter, of encrusted pigment as a literal material, was central to post-War French painting when Olitski was studying in Paris in the fifties. In his French & Co. show in 1960, he showed paintings with mottled plaster crusts quite indistinguishable from Parisian *art informel* except by their generally larger size.

By returning to his own roots in Parisian painting, Olitski found a way seemingly to outdistance his colleagues who remained loyal to the stain technique. I say seemingly, because the contradictions that

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result from an effort to combine the surface emphasis of *informel* painting with monumental scale and grandiose aspirations for a disembodied art of pure color and light are singularly unconvincing.

Although I was very enthusiastic about Olitski's initial stain paintings of the early sixties, I came to have more and more reservations regarding his works as they began increasingly to rely on familiar art historical formats to sustain their purported radicality. In the last series of paintings in the stain technique, for example, large fields of fluid paint are given awesome scale by the presence of tiny dots of color that cause the fields to appear that much grander in comparison. This was a device to establish heroic scale well known to classical landscape painters like Domenichino and Poussin who added tiny *staffage* figures to their panoramic views. In nineteenth century American landscape painting, the discrepancy between miniscule figures and gigantesque landscape become ludicrously contrasted; but Americans have a tendency to exaggerate.

Olitski's ambition forces him to return to academic formulae to establish his paintings as pictures, differentiating them from experiences of pure phenomena that painting cannot deliver. As an example of such contrivance one may cite Olitski's use of drawing. For Olitski, drawing functions in two ways: to establish scale in contrast with immense fields of color, and to frame these fields, defining their boundaries so that they may be understood as pictorial statements as opposed to just yard goods. Toward this end he elaborates the edges of the canvas with various kinds of apparently nonchalant marks. Olitski's emphasis on the frame, created by drawing around the edges, is crucial to defining the solid wall of opaque pigment he has built up as a painting, as opposed to just another architectural surface. Moreover, drawing is necessary to define the location of the picture plane, since the tonal modulations present within the field would otherwise create the illusion that the picture plane itself was buckling.

Olitski's most successful attempts to emphasize the frame were those of his spray paintings in which an internal frame, reminiscent of Seurat's halo of pointillist dots around his compositions, were masked-off around the perimeter of the canvas. Dissatisfied with this solution, Olitski opted for attempting to establish the rectangle of the canvas as a shape strong enough to act as a container for modulated color. Unfortunately the rectangle is the simplest and hence the weak-

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est *gestalt,* with the result that these paintings had the tendency to decompose visually, having no strong boundaries to frame the billowing clouds of sprayed, shapeless color.

Olitski soon realized there was only one way out of such a dilemma: the use of framing *repoussoir* elements to lend coherence to atmospheric effects. The use of such *repoussoir* framing devices are common to the paintings of luminists like Turner. Undoubtedly Turner, and the whole concept of the sublime that Turner's seascapes epitomize, was a crucial inspiration for Olitski. Turner, like Olitski, was one of the original practitioners of aesthetic brinkmanship. Some of his paintings seem to be asking the same question Olitski now poses — how far can you go in the direction of an art of pure color and light and still make paintings?

The fantasy of immaterial painting is a contradiction in terms. Although it may depict color and light, no painting can actually *be* disembodied color and light. This confusion, however, seems a peculiarly American heresy initiated by the Sychromists, the original American pseudo-visionaries. Like Thomas Wilfred, whose Lumia Suite, the light box that still pathetically anticipates color television in the Museum of Modern Art lounge, Olitski is guilty of asking of painting what painting cannot deliver.

In the prophetic essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin wrote in 1935: "The history of every form of art comprises critical periods in which art aspires to produce effects that can be achieved only after a drastic modification of the technical *status quo,* that is to say by a new form of art." Surely there is an art of pure light and color, and it is realized in slides, films, and the rapidly developing new art of video, but not in painting.

Despite the emergence of these new forms, there is still a lot of good painting going on today, and it is addressed, like Olitski's art, primarily to a redefinition of the roles of drawing and surface within a fresh approach to the painterly. It does not, however, defy the limits of the pictorial in the pursuit of a spurious radicality that can be redeemed only through academic contrivance.

I have spoken at such length of Olitski's work because it actually represents the focus for dialogue that seems to be lacking. Olitski is surely addressing the crucial questions. But his answers, I fear,

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are a good indication of the present state of moral as well as esthetic confusion. The combination of a purely pyrotechnical display of spectacle for its own sake, together with an emphasis on paint as literal matter is a particular kind of contradiction that could only occur to a consciousness capable of mistaking the hedonistic for the visionary, the material for the mystical. Although advanced abstract art today is free at last of any ties to the representational art of the past, it is not free of *all* limitations, for it must continue to operate within the boundaries of what constitutes a convincing pictorial statement. The issue of limits is as crucial to painting in the seventies as it is to other areas of thought.

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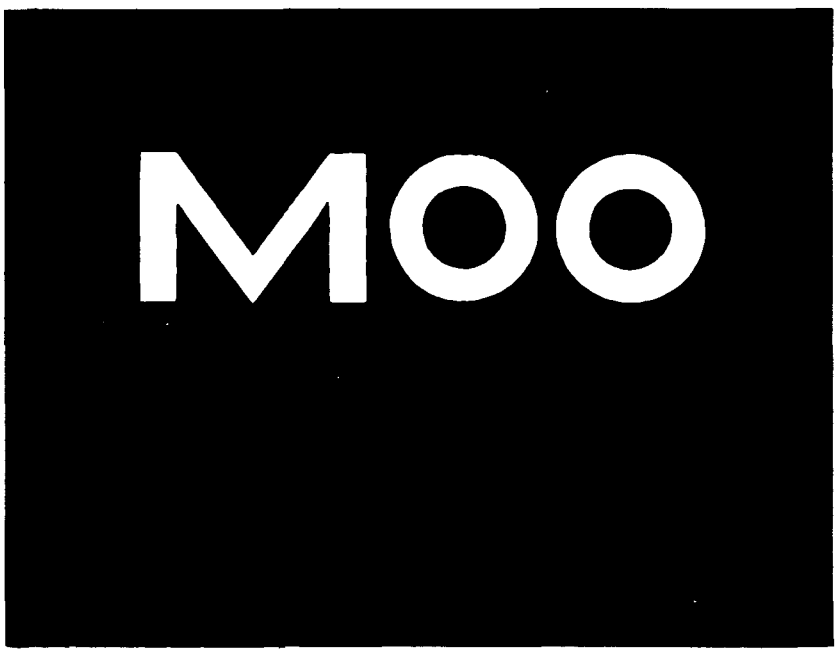
Alicia Ostriker

# POEM OBJECTS

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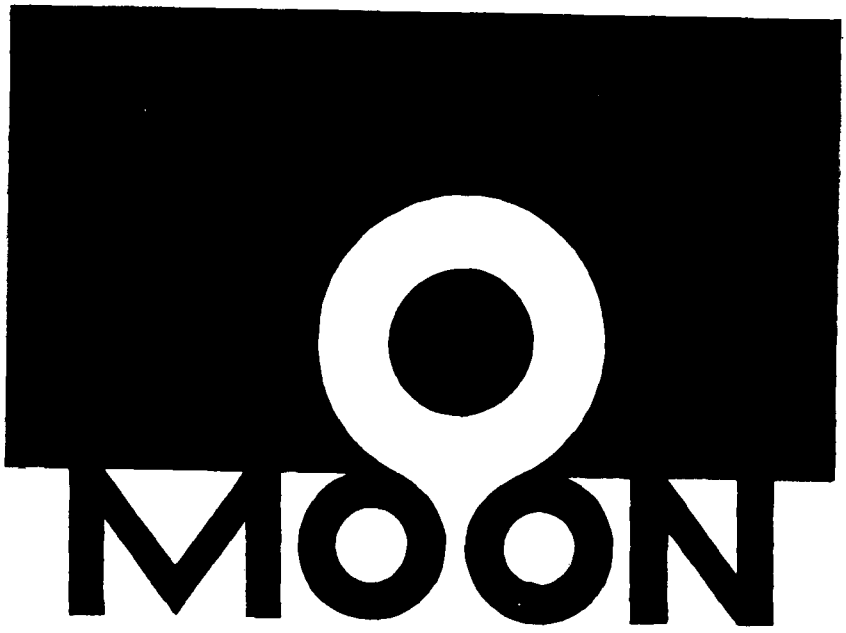


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Try reading the following, by e. e. cummings:

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                    r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
              who
a)s w(e loo)k
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          PPEGORHRASS
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rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
,grasshopper;
```

Did you get it? Of course, translated back to "grasshopper who as we look up now gathering GRASSHOPPER to the leap arriving grasshopper to rearrangingly become grasshopper," it loses something. A certain activity — of grasshopper, of poet, of perception, to which ordinary "reading" is inadequate. Not for nothing does Cummings imply by the title's anagram that this one of God's creatures, despite or because he is common as the grass he hops in, is a prophet–messenger–sage. Not for nothing does the grasshopper end in a semicolon; set to go again. Obviously, this poem is a paradigmatic forerunner, or forejumper, of concrete poetry.

And what is concrete poetry? A global postwar movement. Sources in Mallarmé, Nietzsche, Apollinaire, Joyce–Pound–Cummings, modern linguistics, industrial design, communications and computer technology, Gestalt psychology. And what is concrete poem? Concrete poem is Object. "Useful Object." Concrete poem equals poem/ picture; poem/ sound; poem/ sequence in time; poem/ structure in space. Concrete poem takes qualities inherent in all poems, and brings them from periphery of literary consciousness to center

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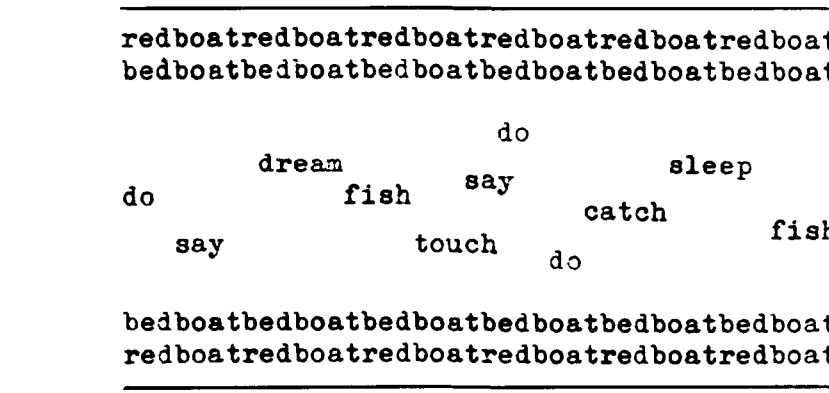
stage. Its realizations to date are both technically revolutionary and poetically wonderful. Its future could possibly transform our understanding of the arts.

In one sense, to begin with, all poetry is concrete poetry. No poem, let us say a Shakespeare sonnet, or *Paradise Lost,* exists in the first place without a particular shapeliness on page, sound in ear, progression brief or extended in rhythms through time. "The figure the poem makes," to use Frost's phrase for what a poem is (in eye, ear, a succession of perceptions, some semantic, some not), is its secret message. Such the distinction between *Paradise Lost* (shape: columnar; sound: "organ"; period: extended) and its commentaries, parallel to the distinction between a tree and a botany textbook.

Anyone acquainted with poetry knows that the closed couplet communicates a message different from that of blank verse. "I




am closed; I am the product of a strictly disciplined segmenting mind. . . ." "I move forward; I am the product of a vigor which overrides boundaries. . . ." Anyone knows that a pentameter line communicates "weightiness and substantiality" while a trimeter line communicates "lightness and delicacy," independently of whatever else they say. Other slightly subtler examples: consider the difference between a Shakespearean sonnet of four quatrains and a couplet, which always goes "PUSH/PUSH/PUSH/ it," and a Keats sonnet constructed of octet and sestet, which always says "PASSIONS/ SQUEEZE." Or the difference between the solid roughly rectangular shape of any sonnet, and the little lines plus little spaces of a lyric by William Carlos Williams. In-

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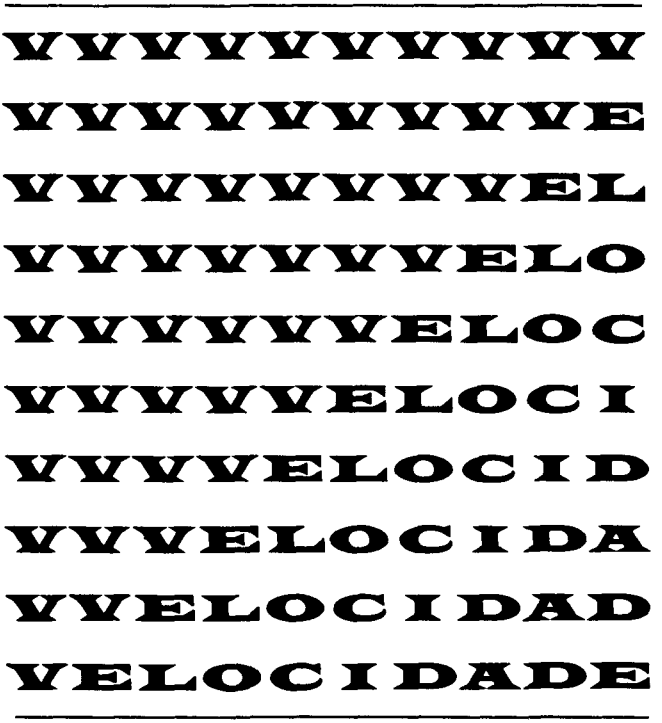
deed the advent of empty space as a variable which might be utilized in the shaping of poems, clearly coincident with the opening of astronomical space and geological time within the literary mind, suddenly throws all previous poetry into relief as belonging to closed universes. So that when you see a poem in which space *occurs*, you are seeing a new cosmos.

Poets try to remind us that poems are things made of words which offer us a structure, a pattern, a certain use of materials.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"Meaning" (i.e., semantic meaning) in a poem, remarks T. S. Eliot, is something one throws the reader as a burglar throws steaks to dogs, to keep them occupied while he goes about his actual business. Musical meaning would be something else again. Similarly, "Beauty is momentary in the mind. . . . But in the flesh it is immortal," murmurs Stevens. "No belly and no bowels / Only consonants and vowels," chuckles Ransom at the close of his "Literary Cocktail Party," getting back to basics. All poems are objects with physical properties that make an impact. All poems are concrete poems. As a rule, how-

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ever, the concreteness is obscured for all save the most sensitive readers (other poets) by their (cruder) meanings or messages, that whole burden of ideas, emotions, references, images, symbols, *und so weiter,* which students paraphrase for term papers, and which provide an honest livelihood for scholars and critics of literature. In other words, semantics stomps all over mere sensation. We read, carefully, and suppose that sufficient. We hear what we read, superficially and clumsily. We see what we read, virtually not at all.

But how do you "read" this segment of Ronald Johnson's "Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy," except as a moo in the moonlight? Or how do you "read" Bory's vortex except in smooth echoing arcs?

Returning the word to its status as thing, and us to our senses, is the project of Concrete Poetry as a movement. It parallels the reduction of painting to pigment on canvas, or music to tones and silences. True, painting was pigment on canvas before the twentieth century, and a few square inches of Rembrandt make as interesting pure painting as a few square yards of Rothko, but who looks? Representational/ emotional/ intellectual messages in the arts engage attention and obscure the medium. Therefore, to maximize awareness of medium and materials, minimize the message; in poetry, minimize semantic freight. Place up front, where nobody can fail to apprehend, consonants and vowels. Appeal through typography and spacing on page — not taking left-to-right for granted, taking nothing for granted — *first of all* to eyes, ears, the kinetic sense of this momentous act of turning the page. Capture the reader with simplicity and, though one blush to say it, with beauty.

"The aim of the new poetry is to give poetry an organic function in society again, and in doing so to restate the position of poet in society. . . . Concrete poetry is founded upon the contemporary scientific-technical view of the world and will come into its own in the synthetic-rationalistic world of tomorrow." So writes the Bolivian–born Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer, one of the movement's founders, in the course of a complicated discussion of relations between modern technology, modern developments in language, and the permanent nature of art. For Pierre Garnier, a second-generation concrete poet, the movement is a "metamorphosis that leads us beyond existential fear . . . escape from the old social order and from the storehouse of available ideas which has remained unchanged for thousands of

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years and in which all revolutions are engulfed and lost. . . . The word is an element./ The word is a material./ The word is an object./ Words are the visible aspects of ideas just as the trunk and the foliage are the visible aspects of a tree. . . . If the material is spirit, we must let it work; the work of the painter and the poet will consist in making it . . . present." For Emmett Williams, in typically breezy American fashion stressing the movement's playfulness, "material meant material to me, and i felt that i could do anything i wanted to with it. collage it, paint it over, isolate every detail and look at it that way, throw it together at random, put it together according to a strict system. . . ." And as Ian Hamilton Finlay suggests with his usual angelic tact, "one does not want a *glittering* perfection which forgets that the world is, after all, also to be made by man into his *home,*" yet " 'concrete' by its very limitations offers a tangible image of goodness and sanity. . . . It is a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt."

A

. . . blue boat
a brown sail

LITTLE

a brown boat
a green sail

TO PUT

a green boat
a black sail

YOUR EYES

a black boat
a blue sail

TO SLEEP

a . . .

LITTLE . . .

Historically, the movement goes from birth pangs to vigorous adolescence with shocking suddenness. Its method occurs marginally in the past: Herbert's altar or Easter wings, the mouse's tail in *Alice,* for example. "Modernism" makes straight the way. Abruptly in the 1950s, as if one threw a switch on some previously prepared global network, men on four continents more or less independently begin to make these little objects that speak to each other across the crust of the world. Judging by the conversion experiences many of them have recorded in the guise of rationales, several factors operated. Old forms were boring in themselves. They were imprisoning and could not avoid bearing false witness. They were overly personal where the poets wanted to divest themselves of ego. They failed to

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correspond to the state of technology and the other arts. They failed to embody modern principles of linguistics. Finally, they were incapable of communicating to masses of people.

Ripeness was all. In 1951, Gomringer began producing works he called "constellations," influenced by symbolist poetry and concrete painting, for a projected magazine which was to be edited with two graphic artist friends, and was to "embrace poetry, the plastic arts, graphics, architecture, and industrial design." Previous to this, he had "reached the stage of the sonnet" and became blocked by a sense of discordance between his work and the state of other arts, unable to write. The new form he groped toward would unite linguistic expression with physical reality, appeal through play-activity to "modern man," and imprint its effects on ordinary language. In 1952, three poets of Sao Paulo, Brazil — Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Decio Pignatari — formed the "Noigandres group," name charmingly taken from Pound's Canto XX, where old Lévy, encountering the word in Arnaut Daniel, grumbles "Noigandres, eh, *noi*gandres/ Now what the DEFFIL can that mean!" Planting their aesthetics on the collective shoulders of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Pound's ideograms, Joyce, Cummings, concrete art, Mondrian's Boogie-Woogie, Calder, Webern's "Klangfarbenmelodie," and Gestalt psychology, they propounded the new "verbivocovisual" Word. They rapidly gained prominence in Brazilian culture, had their work publicly performed, and made contacts with other artists in South America and Europe, while exploiting the new mode for politically and socially satiric purposes. By 1956 Gomringer and the Noigandres group had met and agreed to call their mutual endeavors "concrete poetry." At the same time, and independently, Oylvind Fahlstrom had published the first manifesto for concrete poetry in Stockholm in 1953. Diter Rot, born in Germany and educated as an artist in Switzerland, was publishing "ideograms" in Iceland. Carlfriedrich Claus was making *"klangbilden"* and *"phasen"* in East Germany. And a circle of two poets, a composer, an architect, and a jazz musician were collaborating on concrete projects in Vienna. In 1957 Haroldo de Campos introduced concrete poetry to Kitasono Katue of Japan, who has since become a major contributor; and Daniel Spoerri, a Romanian-born artist in dance, mime, and experimental theater, published in Darmstadt, Germany, the first international

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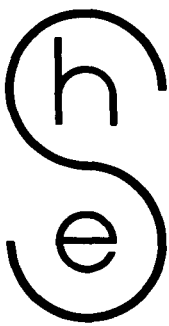
anthology of concrete poetry. Within ten years, "after the concrete 'renaissance' in England, Germany, and Sweden during the early sixties, and the growing interest in the new poetry in such diverse settings as Czechoslovakia, France, Spain, and the United States, the poet Jonathan Williams could write, with apparent justification: 'If there is such a thing as a worldwide movement in the art of poetry, concrete is it.' " By this time a branch movement of semiotic or code poetry had developed; some poets were writing poems as "scores for electric sonorization"; others were writing "action poetry" which utilized "living" material and tape recorder manipulations; still others were making sculptural and architectural poems in materials ranging from plexiglass to cast iron.




he=ele
&=e
she=ela

S=serpens
h=homo
e=eva

One might expect, shuddering faintly at the idea of "the synthetic–rationalistic world of tomorrow," that concrete poetry would be skeletally formalist and a general abomination. Literary folk belonging to the old school of humanist thinking which regards all technological development as a threat — though not those belonging to a still older (renaissance-enlightenment) school which regards it as potentially liberating — will react as if such goings on were the antichrist. The contrary is true. In fact, the wonderful thing here has little to do intrinsically with cultural history or technological development. It is simply that absolute fresh experiences can emerge when the word is liberated from its context of phrase and sentence, as if some energy customarily compressed into syntactic forms could be freed like the energy locked into an atom, when that atom is split. The grain of sand is cleft. We see the worlds that were in it.

Consider what happens in *space* in Finlay's redboat/bedboat poem. Clusters of words are floating, a reverie, semiassociated; easy motion; waves; bounded by tight lines top and bottom (the man is

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in the boat, the lines are the sides of the boat, the thoughts are in the man's mind, the lines are the frame of his thinking, the boat is the mind, the mind is a boat); contrast between strict linearity and free room; yet they balance; openness is bounded, boundaries contain openness; yet too, no boundary lines fore and aft; so the boat-mind moves forward, perhaps; or is by nature unenclosed as well as enclosed; or we see but a segment? Then too it is a red-boat on the outside but a bed-boat on the inside, so the space of the poem is "objective" at the border between itself and not-itself, and "subjective" in its middle, like us all. None of these effects could exist without the spatial play. Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" comes close in tone, partly because its short lines effect a comparable breakup of syntax and allow a sense of space within and around the poem, partly because the poem contains some semantic equivalent of spatial clues in its phrasing: "upon," "glazed with," "beside:"

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

Now consider what different things are done with *time* in the next three poems. In Ronaldo Azerado's "Velocidade," the VVV transcription of sound of motor hums along and then suddenly vanishes into its significance as the final line shoots into consciousness. This might be the equivalent of the way a car approaching from a distance suddenly seems to speed up at the moment it passes you. In Jandl's "film," reproduced here in its actual tiny size, the illusion of continuity in film is reduced to its mechanics because optic sensations are forced into quick jittery time units. Reading this poem seems far more difficult than an ordinary act of reading or gazing, but the difficulty heightens consciousness. Jandl's gloss on the poem states, "this poem is a film. There are two actors, i and l. The action starts in

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line 5 and ends in the 5th line from the bottom. i is alone, changes position 3 times, disappears, l appears disappears, i appears disappears, both appear together changing position, like dancing; then i disappears for a long time, which, after stunning l, makes l restless, then immobile, like resignation; when at last i reappears, the dancelike jumping about and out of the picture and back again is resumed for a longer stretch than the first time. This state is final. It is the happy ending of the film. *flim,* if you like, is the weightier half of the German *flimmern,* to flicker." But an altogether different treatment of time operates in Finlay's lullaby, "a little poem to put your eyes to sleep a little." Here two tempi, both slow, but the upper case, the speaker of the lullaby, slower than the lower case, the receiver of the lullaby, together form a rocking motion and finally intersect as the poem comes round to end where it began and drowse decelerates toward sleep.

Finally, observe what happens to *sequence* in Aram Saroyan's wake/walk poem, a classic of the permutational style. It is "about" both the freshness of ing, and, behind that, the life emerging from preily up to first full congence, simultaneously, of mouthings to speech. Althe retrogression back to the final permutation, paradigm of "growth" in one need not suppose about any of these matthe contrary, this is obpoem. It looks as if it composing at the typefunction of its ease.

```
crickets
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what we do each mornmorning process of each natal rest, stirring clumstrol of its body. Emerlanguage from incoherent so, the use of pause, and less coherence just before makes this an accurate any area. Incidentally, that Saroyan cogitated ters before writing. On viously an easy playful took a couple of minutes writer. Its accuracy is a

In each of these poems, disengagement from habitual structures and engagement in nonhabitual one brings us to something unique and whole, simultaneously in language and ourselves. Of course, these illustrations are necessarily extremely simple ones, and represent the full range of concrete techniques about as well as a miscellany of song lyrics would represent 1580–1603 in Tudor poetry. Perfect, yes;

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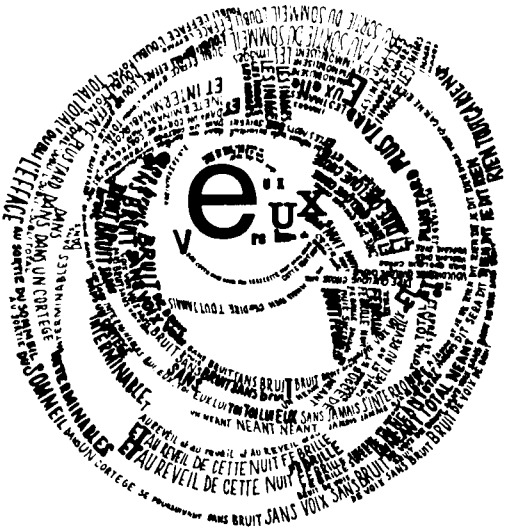


but more went on. To multiply instances and complexities, any of these anthologies published here within the last few years will do.[1]

Solt's book is the most scholarly and most posh of the three. This is a big, fancy job, with extensive glosses in Spanish and English, snapshots of most of the poets, an excellent bibliography, and a large section of manifestos and statements on concrete poetry, valuable to the serious student. Its selections also comprise the greatest variety of concrete techniques, from the demurely typewritten to the wildly woolly electronic. The editor's long and academic introduction, while densely informative, is only barely readable, unfortunately.

If you are not a "serious student" but want a large, broad anthology for pleasure, Williams's book contains over three hundred selections — more than twice as many as Solt's — by seventy-seven poets. Of those in foreign languages, some are translated, some are glossed. Many include comments by the poets. The brief remarks on the history and aesthetic principles of concrete poetry in the foreword will provide a sufficient sense of security in these matters, and there is a fascinating section of biographies for all the poets at the back.

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Wildman's anthology is modestly ahistorical. As the editor explains, it aims less at "comprehensiveness" than at the production of "a concrete book," in which each turning of the page should be part of an adventure in time and tempo — for "a book is something that unfolds itself," and in this case the unfolding has something like the semblance of a plot. Since it does illustrate a fair range of different effects available to concrete poetry, is quite easily accessible to the English-speaking reader, and has a persuasive and charming "afterword" by Wildman, this anthology is probably the one I would pick for a high school or college text, if I had to pick just one.

This last function has considerable importance. For anyone with an ounce of pictorial or verbal imagination —that is, all children and some adults — concrete poetry in its simpler forms should be catching as fleas. In a writing workshop I taught last year, one quiet young man showed up at the first session with a small concrete poem. I feared for him in the jungle of his egomaniacal young peers. None of them had ever heard of such things. "What is THAT," they jeered. In two weeks they were eating out of his hand. Nobody would go home until they had crowded and shoved each other over his latest. By the end of semester they were performing his concretes and making their own. Incidentally, "Sesame Street" clearly runs on concrete tracks — probably independently invented.

As to larger, more complex, or more experimental forms — concrete principles have already influenced work in the plastic and performing arts. They will doubtless continue to do so. How much influence they will have on literature is an open question at this point. In the United States, the movement has been relatively weak compared to its strength in other parts of the world. Perhaps internationalism is a handicap in a country whose literary life is so monolingual and whose literary people do so much domestic navel-gazing, as our own. Americans do seem better at *exporting* cultural movements than at *importing* them. Still, Planet Earth is Planet Earth. It bears watching.

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1 Mary Ellen Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry: A World View.* (Bloomington: The Indiana University Press, 1953). Emmett Williams, ed., *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York City: Something Else Press, Inc., 1967). Eugene Wildman, ed., *Anthology of Concretism* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1967).

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Stephen Farber

# WRITING ABOUT MOVIES

Movie critics seem to battle more frequently and more abusively than critics of the other arts, and that may be because they are trying to conceal how little they have to say. For all the fury of their disputes, these film critics have more in common than they would like to admit. Most of them are essentially literary in approach, insensitive to experimental and innovative films; they rely on imprecise assertions and irrelevant opinions, flaunting their most eccentric reactions without making any attempt to validate them. The most recent critical battle was waged by Andrew Sarris and John Simon in the *New York Times* last year, and although there may seem to be radical differences in their positions (Simon defending high art against the assaults of the philistines, Sarris speaking for the hidden artistry of Hollywood trash), there are also some disturbing similarities.

Sarris is unquestionably the more important figure; he has probably been more influential than any other critic currently practicing in America. As most people know, Sarris is the foremost American proponent of the *auteur* theory of film criticism — a theory borrowed from the French that identifies the director as "author" of a film, and that emphasizes the virtues of many old-line Hollywood directors (like John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, and Howard Hawks), whose artistry is said to grow from tension between their personal vision and the crippling constraints placed on them by the studio system. On the positive side Sarris has helped to focus attention on the role of the director, and has alerted many people to the possibility that talent and originality might be found in American films. In the early sixties, when Sarris published his "Notes on the Auteur Theory," almost the only respectable films were a handful from Europe, while American films — which had and continue to have many strengths — were ignored and despised. That situation has changed drastically; in fact, criticism has now moved too far in the opposite direction. Sarris introduced a more catholic ap-

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proach to films; and if American films have demonstrated greater integrity and maturity during the last decade, that is at least partly because the *auteur* theory helped to instill in American directors a necessary sense of self-respect. Ironically, it has also encouraged greater ambitiousness and self-consciousness than could be found in the more primitive genre films of *auteur* idols like Ford and Hawks, and the auteurists themselves have not always been happy with the results. They have made American movies respectable, but once something become respectable, it loses its unpretentiousness. The modest, energetic, old–straightforward genre picture — sacred to the auteurists, and also canonized by Manny Farber (see his recent collection of criticism, *Negative Space*) under the name of Underground Films — has just about disappeared forever.

But whatever the fringe benefits of auteurism, the theory itself has grave limitations, most of which were exposed by Pauline Kael ten years ago in her superb essay, "Circles and Squares" (reprinted in her first book, *I Lost It At the Movies*). Unfortunately, though Kael won that battle in the pages of *Film Quarterly,* it is Sarris who has won the war. The *auteur* approach to films is now deeply entrenched. The two *New York Times* critics are committed auteurists, and, even more important, in film schools everywhere, the *auteur* theory is now gospel; well attended campus retrospectives center on the soap operas of Douglas Sirk or the B-melodramas of Samuel Fuller, and the program notes, full of arcane references, are expanded into doctoral dissertations. In another decade or so, the *auteur* theory could dominate all written criticism of film.

Actually, the word "theory" is inaccurate; the *auteur* approach reduces itself to nothing more than a ritualistic listing of favorite directors. In Sarris's pantheon of directors (see *The American Cinema*) some filmmakers are arbitrarily assigned to the magic inner cirle, others to the despised outer circles, and although there are feeble attempts to explain these distinctions — through references to "personal style" and "*mise-en-scène*" — they remain true mysteries, outside the realm of reason. Sarris himself offers a warning in the introduction to his collection of criticism, *Confessions of a Cultist*: "Of course, lacking intellectual discipline, the passion of a cultist could be perverted into mindless mysticism and infantile irrationality."

To say that works of art exhibit a personal style is, in one sense, a truism, a point so obvious that it should hardly require emphasis. But in another sense the mystique of "personal style" is a dubious basis for a critical theory. It is true that one can observe the same themes and obsessions in a number of Hawks's films: the code of the profes-

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sional (a kind of quasi-existential stoicism that comes directly from Hemingway), the purity of masculine friendship, sexual tensions and rivalries between men and women who are equally independent. One can easily see the resemblances among Hawks's competitive, sexually provocative, self-reliant women — for example, Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday,* Lauren Bacall in *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep,* Jane Russell in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,* Angie Dickinson in *Rio Bravo.* But the similarities are not necessarily evidence of a unified artistic vision. One could just as readily conclude that Hawks is simply reworking formulas that he's found to be sure-fire entertainment. Of *El Dorado* Sarris writes: "Above all, Hawks has dared to repeat himself shamelessly from *Rio Bravo,* and revel in the repetition and the self-awareness." Astoundingly, this is meant as the highest praise.

Hawks's films do have a distinctive flavor, which raises them a notch above the run-of-the-mill Hollywood entertainments of the period. But Hawks rarely tests himself to discover meaningful new variations on the themes that obsess him — in the way that Bergman does, for example. The "self-plagiarism" that Sarris considers a sign of greatness is actually no more than a sign of laziness. Then too, it may be that the personal concerns of Hawks's films are in themselves indications of limitations rather than strengths. Hawks perpetuates a myth of masculine cool and bravado that, while deeply felt and interesting in sociological terms, is also shallow, distorted, and adolescent. Hawks's best film is probably *Red River,* in which he does examine his typically virile, stoical hero from a new perspective, for the first time pointing up the egotism, ruthlessness, and brutality implicit in the masculine "professionalism" more confidently celebrated in his other films. *Red River* contains some self-questioning, some real exploration of his obsessions. Perhaps *Red River* is more meaningful, as the auteurists would argue, if you know something about Hawks's career. But the *auteur* approach cannot transform his other films — often charming but stubbornly superficial — into works of genius.

Of course in the case of many alleged *auteurs* — technicians and adapters like George Cukor or Blake Edwards — even the cultists' identification of a "personal style" seems dubious. At the same time films by many directors Sarris dismisses as "impersonal" — David Lean or William Wyler, for example — might be found to yield hidden traces of "personal" themes just as often as films of the more beloved *auteurs.* (Many of Lean's films concern an individual trying to escape or transcend what he is by absorbing himself in a dangerous and exotic world; while Wyler's films often confront the intensities of family relationships or

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forced intimacy.) It's easy to play this game, discovering chance links between highly disparate films; and even if the links are not accidental, identifying them should be only the first step in evaluating the achievements of the individual films. Sarris admiringly quotes Truffaut's aphorism (lifted from Giraudoux), "There are no works; there are only authors." We could do with less exaltation of authors, and more rigorous, detailed criticism of the works themselves.

Although the auteurists claim to be more sensitive to the visual side of films than more "bookish" highbrow critics, it is ironic that Sarris himself is at his feeblest when he attempts to describe or evoke the visual style of a film. Amusingly, *Confessions of a Cultist* demonstrates that Sarris is excellent on literary adaptations like *In Cold Blood, Goodbye, Columbus,* or *Laughter in the Dark,* carefully comparing the film to its source; he is very good discussing the social implications and confusions of many Hollywood "problem films"; he can be very perceptive in flashes — when the requirements of the *auteur* theory are momentarily allowed to relax; and he writes moving tributes to films (like *Boudu Saved from Drowning*) that appeal to his romanticism; but he is at a total loss when trying to analyze the visual qualities of the medium. "Preminger's *mise-en-scène* in *Bunny Lake Is Missing* is the most brilliant I have seen all year," Sarris writes, but you read on in vain trying to discover *why.* Mooning over John Ford's *Seven Women,* Sarris concludes, "The fake Metro set and sky, and the arbitrariness of the plot, are the materials of one of the cinema's greatest poets" — and the glaring contradiction is left unexplained. When he does attempt a concrete description of camera work or cutting, the result is often gibberish, as in this sphynxlike statement about *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*: "In a situation fraught with the peril of cross-cutting, Aldrich falls back on the natural planes of the action — Bette [Davis] standing, Joan [Crawford] sitting, Bette downstairs and outside, Joan upstairs and inside. The diagonals are derived from the plot and decor."

Sarris's true prejudices can be seen in his defense of *Gertrud*: "It is time the aestheticians of illiterate images realized that Carl Dreyer's *Gertrud* is the picture of the year because people sit and talk on a couch, and there is no greater spectacle in the cinema than a man and a woman talking away their share of eternity together." Quite a curious statement from an advocate of visual style and "mystical *mise-en-scène.*" Sarris, like the "bookish" film critics he often attacks, is more comfortable discussing dialogue, story, and characters than he is with the formal elements of cinema, which can enrich and transform the "literary" themes. Perhaps that is why he prefers the tired narrative films

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of aging Hollywood entertainers — or the bloodless drawing-room comedies of Eric Rohmer — to the more innovative works that shatter traditional assumptions of what film can achieve.

In spite of Sarris's elaborate, indefensible theory, he is less rigid than many of his auteurist disciples. An "unchosen" director occasionally wins a reprieve from him. And since he basically likes movies, he is open to unheralded films by relatively unknown directors; he was among the first to perceive the originality in offbeat, overlooked genre films like *Welcome to Hard Times, Point Blank,* and *The Strange Affair.* And this openness seems precious when one places Sarris's writings against those of John Simon. Simon is undoubtedly one of the most intelligent and best-educated people now writing about moives, but his sternness is not a satisfactory alternative to the "mindless mysticism" or "infantile irrationality" of the cultists. Again and again he chides films for failing to reach some impossibly exalted realm of greatness, invoking the holy name of Art as frequently and as imprecisely as the auteurists invoke the mystical concept of *"mise-en-scène." They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* "does not, as a whole, reach the domain of art"; *Z* falls "short of being a work of art"; *Patton* has some striking images, but "that in itself does not make a film a work of art." It all seems beside the point. As Ernest Callenbach observed, "What makes the reader impatient is the disproportion between Simon's complex cogitative machinery and the modest cognitive foundation of observations and insights upon which it unsteadily rests. Simon impresses us by the force of his arguments, never by his perceptions. . . ."

Simon's shrill rhetoric of overkill has already been criticized often enough so that I should not have to belabor its obvious inadequacy. The people who think Simon is our greatest critic are those who believe that nastiness is the only sign of integrity. But when Simon devotes pages of finely tuned invective to an insignificant work like *The Sandpiper* or *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls,* it is clear that he is more interested in showing off his elegant malicious style than in confronting films that mean something; he claims to admire *Pretty Poison,* yet he writes a much longer piece denouncing the frivolous, transparently awful *Joanna.*

The disturbing thing is how little substance there is in Simon's reviews. In the introduction to his recent collection of criticism, *Movies Into Film,* he makes a point of distinguishing criticism from reviewing, and "film critics" from mere "movie critics" — distinctions every bit as arbitrary as those in Sarris's pantheon of directors. The irony is that most of Simon's own pieces are nothing more than reviews — high–

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class consumer guidance. His typical review consists of a lengthy plot summary and a scorecard, with capsule evaluations of each contributor's achievement — a few lines about the writer, director, cinematographer, composer, art director, costume designer, and actors. Writing about theater, Simon does seem — at times anyway — more involved, more willing to take on a challenging work and examine its texture and all of its implications. With films he remains aloof, a patronizing gentleman-critic who never seems fully engaged unless there is something to denounce. He kills interest by pretending that films can be managed with geometrical precision. Near the opening of his review of *The Graduate,* he writes, "The movie's principal weaknesses are oversimplification, overelaboration, inconsistency, eclecticism, obviousness, pretentiousness, and, especially in the penultimate section, sketchiness. Let us examine these one by one." It is not that I disagree with this evaluation of *The Graduate;* but Simon writes with a smug schoolmaster's condescension that is a poor substitute for the ecstasies of the less intelligent reviewers.

Another irony about John Simon is that his reputation as a "scrupulously toughminded" critic (as Dwight Macdonald characterized him) does not hold up under close scrutiny. It is true that he has blasted films like *8½, Morgan, Point Blank, Bonnie and Clyde, Petulia, Performance, The Music Lovers, The Conformist,* everything by Godard — films that are far from equally successful, but that I would include among the most important of the last decade. Among the films Simon has reviewed rather favorably, however, are sentimental or sensational trash like *Mondo Cane, Dear John, Goodbye Mr. Chips, Joe, Friends, Long Ago Tomorrow,* and most recently, the tricky, fatuously euphoric film of *Slaughterhouse-Five.* His praise of *Long Ago Tomorrow* — a tear-jerking love story of two paraplegics against the system, barely competent mush — will be especially hard for him to live down. It does reveal that underneath his hard, cynical shell quivers just another bleeding heart. Simon rejects the experiments of Fellini, Lester, and Godard — in order to swoon over a soap opera by Bryan Forbes. To give another example, Simon opened his rave review of Raoul Coutard's *Hoa Binh* with a schoolmarm's homily: "If there is such a thing as a film that makes its viewer a better human being — and I dearly hope there is — *Hoa Binh* is it." I had to reread the byline to make sure the article had not been written by Richard Nixon. Set in Saigon, *Hoa Binh* is in fact a pleasant, nicely observed, very well made film, but in the last analysis much too soft; its nonpartisan message — an unobjectionable plea to end the war so that the children can be saved — is an overly

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safe, facile approach to the horror of Vietnam. Coutard's all-encompassing "compassion" lets us off the hook. For if everyone is guilty, no one is.

As his reviews of *Hoa Binh* and *Long Ago Tomorrow* would suggest, Simon, like the middlebrow reviewers he despises, wants "humanity" in art, and he is not open to works that reject the premises of the nineteenth century novel. His morally outraged reviews of *Performance, Myra Breckinridge,* or *The Devils* are the reviews Wanda Hale of the *Daily News* would like to write — if only she had Simon's arsenal of adjectives. Simon's hysterical reaction to *Performance* is revealing. Its deliberate mockery of the traditional decencies so outrages him that he refuses to consider the possibility that there might be a very clear structure to the film; despite its perversity, and its interest in the irrational, it is almost a classical work in the precision with which the images express the meaning of the conversion story.

Simon is a traditionalist, not merely unresponsive but actually hostile to unconventional or experimental work. Among important film artists only Bergman wins his complete assent — and that is undoubtedly because Bergman comes from the theater, and his sensibility is more literary than cinematic. This is not to say Simon is incapable of responding to the visual qualities of film. On the contrary, he gushes rather embarrassingly about visual "beauty." He writes of *Z*, "Raoul Coutard is a magnificent cinematographer, and his work with light and shadow, sunburst and brooding nightscape, treacherously lovely exteriors and morose interiors is always exciting without falling into mere prettiness." But he does not go on to analyze what makes the individual images "exciting." Simon's attitude toward the visual side of film is that it is essentially no more than background to the story and themes. Simon almost always separates his discussion of themes from his discussion of photography; his main interest is in a film's literary qualities, and the rest is dressing. This explains why Simon will spend a great deal of time rapturously describing the color in *A Man and A Woman* —which is mere ornamentation — but fail to come to terms with *8½* or *Walkabout,* where the ideas are communicated through images which have more than a decorative purpose.

The one encouraging sign is that Simon seems to be mellowing. His open, sympathetic, perceptive reviews of recent films like *Medium Cool, Downhill Racer, They Shoot Horses Don't They?, La Femme Infidele,* and *Straw Dogs* suggest that he may be moving beyond his rigid, patronizing approach to movies. In another decade he may even qualify for the title of "film critic."

I must, however, say something about an infuriating habit of Simon's — his compulsive discussions of the physical shortcomings of

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actors (particularly women), and of homosexuality. Simon has defended his talent scout resumés of actors' and actresses' physical characteristics by saying that film is a visual medium. That hardly justifies ugly comments like these: "The daughter is played by Anne Wiazemsky, in private life Mme. Godard, possessed of the face of a horse, the teeth of a rabbit, and the expression of an amoeba." "And there is the supreme horror of the film, Mick Jagger, whose lack of talent is equaled only by a repulsiveness of epic proportions — on those shocking-pink blubber-lips alone a complete *Iliad* and *Odyssey* could be inscribed. Jagger looks so epicene. . . ." A related form of sexual bias can be found in Simon's malice toward homosexuality, disturbing in a man of intelligence. Consider the venom he wastes on *Something for Everyone,* a mediocre, trifling film directed by Harold Prince. Simon ferrets out a disguised homosexual vision underlying the film, attacks what he considers its distorted view of women — though nothing in the film could possibly match the viciousness of his own slurs against Angela Lansbury ("an aging female impersonator gone sloppy, who allows himself to be photographed in costume but without a wig — a bisected androgyne, woman below, man on top . . . a fag hag"). And he is so eager to prove the sickness of the film that he almost willfully misinterprets the satiric portrait of an ex-Nazi servant — a minor character in the movie — as an idealization of Nazism traceable to the filmmakers' alleged homosexuality.

Simon is an extreme case, but not really unrepresentative; outrageous sexual biases and irrelevant affirmations of masculinity crop up fairly regularly in film criticism. Perhaps it has something to do with the number of prominent female film critics, who seem to threaten the egos of many male reviewers. Or this quirk of film criticism may reflect the widespread antiintellectual bias of American society, the fear that if one is a critic or an artist, one is less than a man. This is only one more indication of the debased quality of contemporary film criticism; it is even infected by a rancid intellectualized form of machismo.

* * *

After reading the mysticism of Sarris or the invective of Simon, it is always a pleasure to turn to Pauline Kael, who is by far the best critic now writing regularly about films in America. The marvelous thing is that she is never straitjacketed, as Simon is, by some rigid academic notion of what a critique should be. She ignores formal rules, ranges freely over a film, discussing its themes, its social implications, its evasions, even moving quite unashamedly into autobiography if that can help to illuminate issues that the film raises. Often, in fact, the movie is merely a springboard for ideas that interest her more — recently the film *Billy Jack* led her into a discussion of the image of wo-

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men in films. One often reads her less for what she has to say about the film than for her social and psychological insights; her brief discussion of the transience of love in relation to *La Notte* has stayed with me longer than more laborious philosophical essays.

But to say that she is the best critic now writing is not quite the high praise it may appear to be. In some ways Pauline Kael isn't really a film critic at all. She loves movies, and she is almost always provocative when moving away from a film to examine a larger aesthetic question — see, for example, her remarks on *cinema verité* in her review of Norman Mailer's *Wild 90* (in her last collection *Going Steady*). But others have observed that she is often more interesting when dealing with audience responses to bad popular movies than when analyzing works she claims to admire. She is a brilliant sociologist and pop philosopher — and I don't mean that pejoratively; considering her simply as an essayist, her articles are as pungent and stimulating as anything being written today. Her reviews are alive, but the films themselves often elude her.

Her major virtues and increasingly obvious limitations are visible in her long essay, "Raising Kane," that introduces the screenplay of *Citizen Kane* in the recently published *Citizen Kane Book*. Kael affectionately evokes the period of the twenties and thirties, the spirit of the Algonquin transplanted to Hollywood. She captures the energy, playfulness, and irresponsibility of the talented screenwriters of the thirties, and she mercilessly describes how these writers expiated their guilt at having betrayed their promise by writing the patriotic, sanctimonious antifascist movies of the forties. In discussing Hearst and Marion Davies she writes devastatingly about Hollywood's simplifications of important historical figures, and more generally identifies the distortions in most popular myths of the rich and famous (who must be presented as unloved and scarred by a childhood trauma in order to gratify the mass audience). At times all of the historical, biographical, and sociological material even illuminates some of the unique qualities of *Citizen Kane* — particularly the film's ambivalent attitude toward luxury and corruption. Yet in discussing the film itself, as a creative work, Kael fails to accept its challenge.

She offers generalities about the German Expressionist style of the film — backed up with very little analysis of the individual images — and a great many overconfident assertions. At the beginning Kael mocks the film scholars who talk about *Citizen Kane* as a "tragedy in fugal form," and goes on to inform us that the film "isn't a work of special depth or a work of subtle beauty. It is a shallow work, a *shallow* masterpiece." But if one would like to argue with that characterization,

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Kael offers no arguments in defense of her position; she simply takes it for granted that we will see what she means. She enumerates a number of things that she liked and disliked about the movie, often adding — gratuitously — that she had had the very same response when she first saw the film thirty years earlier. "But, seeing *Kane* now, I winced, as I did the first time, at the empty virtuosity of the shot near the beginning when Kane, dying, drops the glass ball and we see the nurse's entrance reflected in the glass." Or again, "Most of the newspaper-office scenes looked as clumsily staged as ever. . . ." Kael rather arrogantly assumes that we will be interested in her opinions even if she doesn't bother to substantiate them.

This is not the place for a detailed critique of the film, but I do want to suggest one way Kael's charge of shallowness might be answered. It is true that there appears to be a certain superficiality in the portrait of Kane; he never comes alive as a three-dimensional, fully motivated character. But part of what the film is saying is that a man like Kane is not allowed a private life. His only identity is a public identity; he is always aware of playing the role required of him. Beginning with the newsreel documentary of his life, the film keeps moving in on Kane, through four separate narratives, each somewhat more intimate than the one preceding. But we never get quite close enough to see Kane with the fullness and clarity fund in the standard omniscient third-person film. What makes *Citizen Kane* distinctly modern is its self-consciousness about the question of point of view. We see Kane always as others see him — a fact that Welles makes clear *visually*. A brief scene of the solitary old man Kane wheeled around his estate is shot with a handheld camera from outside the fence, and the shots themselves — a rare intelligent use of handheld camera — subtly remind us that we are at a journalist's distance from this man's life. Even the scene that may seem to be the most intimate, revealing moment of the film — Kane's destruction of his wife's room after she has left him — is complicated when the camera suddenly pulls back to reveal that Kane is being watched by the mansion's servants. Consciously or unconsciously, Kane is always playing to an audience; the melodrama of the scene is deliberately exaggerated. And that is why the burning of the sled at the very end is so moving — not because "Rosebud" is the key to Kane's life, but because it reminds us that there *might* be a secret hidden beneath his public mask, a part of him that we can never know, that remains mysterious and inviolate, forever hidden from the perpetually whirring cameras. I don't think this is a brilliant or esoteric interpretation of *Citizen Kane,* but it is a necessary beginning to any understanding of the film. Yet Kael does not get even this far; because she does not *look*

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at the film, she does not bring to it the seriousness and respect that it deserves.

Like most of her critical contemporaries, Kael is weakest on the visual aspects of film, which hardly seem to interest her. Her "Raising Kane" essay clearly exposes her preference for verbal cinema. She explicitly attacks the surrealist idea of film as "dream," though conceding that there may be exceptional artists who can use the visual language of film for expressive purposes. She is more attracted to the snappy, fast-talking comedies of the thirties, and she writes beautifully about those films, and about the screenwriters who came to Hollywood from journalism, literature, and theater. But her impatience with experimental or poetic cinema can lead her to be maddeningly condescending. Thus in discussing Bergman's *Persona,* she can only write lamely about *the difficulty of coming up with a clear interpretation:* "But for this kind of speculation (and one would have to go through almost every image in the movie in this way) to have any purpose, there must be a structure of meanings in the work by which an interpretation can be validated; I don't think there is one in *Persona.*" If you do think there is one, you may resent the way in which Kael cavalierly dismisses the problem.

Kael is disdainful of the kind of close analysis of films that "New Criticism" brought to literature, and because she understands the commercial side of movies, she is properly skeptical about auteurist studies that treat Hollywood hacks as if they were solitary, uncompromising artists. But when she isn't writing about a Hollywood hack, her hard-headed common sense approach can seem perverse or dense rather than perceptive. To take just one example, in a savage review of Ken Russell's *The Music Lovers,* Kael writes, "The surreal sequence with everyone the hero knows clutching at him and the fame-fantasy with colored streamers flying around him would look chichi even in a forties musical." First of all, this isn't even factually quite accurate; the "surreal sequence" and the "fame-fantasy" are actually part of the same sequence —the stylized montage sequence accompanying the *1812 Overture.* More important, she either did not realize or is not saying that the sequence was *intended* as parody, to suggest the growing vulgarity and the hammy sense of showmanship that infected Tchaikovsky's career. But this misreading calls her entire review into question; for if she isn't capable of getting the scenes straight or interpreting the images as they were intended, she isn't really qualified to review this kind of film, which is not conceived as a narrative and is dependent for its meaning on its deliberately overripe visual style.

Unfortunately, there are few alternatives to the literary biases of these three major critics. Even younger critics demonstrate the same

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prejudices. For example, William Pechter — whose collection of criticism, *Twenty-Four Times a Second,* has recently been published — writes regularly for *Commentary,* and has also published long articles in a number of other small magazines; he certainly has the space to develop an argument. But even in his best pieces, for example the one on *Breathless,* a great deal of the discussion centers on an analysis of dialogue and plot. Film is a hybrid art, and there is certainly room for discussion of dialogue, dramatic, and literary qualities of movies. But the qualities unique to film are rarely analyzed even by our most intelligent critics. It may be, as I happen to believe, that film is still in its development stages; there are many interesting or entertaining movies, but I think there are far fewer masterpieces than the scholars and cultists would have us believe, and I feel most of the important experiments in film have come in the last fifteen years or so. But if film is in its adolescence, film criticism is still in its infancy, and we are waiting for a critical language that can encompass the full range of the medium's possibilities.

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# BOOKS

## A STRAIGHTFORWARD STORY

**DOCTOR BRODIE'S REPORT. By J. L. Borges. E. P. Dutton. $5.95.**

Borges says: (1) late stories of Kipling "surpass" the stories of Henry James and Kafka, (2) the method of the stories in *Doctor Brodie's Report* derives from young Kipling's "laconic masterpieces." Thus, in the opening paragraph of the Preface to *Doctor Brodie's Report,* Borges anticipates the appearance of a Jew from Prague in one of the stories and a Jamesian situation in another. Sliding from late to young Kipling, he prevents any suspicion that he vies with Kafka, let alone Kipling. There is more to notice, but, to the weavings of rhetorical nicety, why carry an analytical axe? I surrender therefore to the manner Borgesian — mysteries of coincidental detail, flicker of ideas in brisk, lucid prose — and yet, upon closing his book, find myself reopening it to the Preface where Borges says he is a member of the conservative party and adds, "no one ever branded me a Communist, a nationalist, an anti-Semite, a follower of Billy the Kid, or the dictator Rosas." Maybe the provocation here is considerable. But fools rush in, and I won't be the first. I rush, instead, to a refutation of the charge no one made, and, for dialectical vigor, I begin with a concession: after seeing the trivialization of Kafka, a critic from the Jewish Defense League wouldn't giggle at the Argentinian conservative's list of political sympathies, bigotry, and hoodlum-worship. Beneath its bravado the mixture is potentially homogeneous and no joke. He might consider it self-protective. And, if he were the sort who wanted to feed on literary evils, he would scrutinize the stories — for which this Preface is a complex *entrée* — and he would find two Jews who are superficially stereotypical, perhaps despicable. (True, the enthusiasm of this critic draws a whisper from my lips: *"Vaya, vaya."*) One of the Jews, befriended and trusted by a local hoodlum (whom the Jew admires inordinately), exposes the hoodlum to the police and is instrumental in his nasty death. The Jew

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acts this way at his first opportunity. The other Jew comes from Prague, a man "nothing out of the ordinary," yet remarkably disgusting in his manner and attire.

But, evidence of anti-Semitism, which all of this isn't, is, even if it were, qualified out of existence by such contradictions as "ordinary" and disgusting. They are not failures of invention in the aging Borges, but complexities in point of view. Furthermore, if the Jews are stereotypical, they are also creatures of a thematic obsession. Examples of this occur in the first two stories where a man who appears god-like to his humble associates is, in both stories, sacrificed by them; first nailed to a cross, then betrayed by the Jew as described above. Besides figuring in the author's theme — the unbearable intimacy of friendship and other sacrosanct connections — the Jews are dramatically justified by antagonists whose moral inadequacies they reflect, exploit, and in dishonorable ways, overcome. These are Jews of art, not life. That's part of the problem.

The Afterword of *Doctor Brodie's Report,* where Borges completes his Preface and thus embraces his book, contains more personal data. Here Borges says he identifies with the Jew of the friendly hoodlum. His confession is artistically sincere and as fascinating as the stories of the Jews. Neither story is extraordinarily good, but both are so skillfully turned as to merit the attention of non-paranoid literary analysts who, beneath every verbal surface, don't discover themselves. But one needn't be paranoid to wonder if recent imaginative literature, by some political conservatives, obliges us to consider anti-Semitism as a technical or conventional feature of the highest art. Presumably unrelated to Jew hatred in the real world, it is somehow an expression of simultaneous yearnings for atavistic vitality and the clean conscience of impeccable form (which applies equally well, I admit, to Rudyard Kipling and Mark Spitz), particularly when poetic genius feels threatened by bourgeois, democratic, liberal ideas. The convention, which doesn't exist in Borges, might still bring, to hyper-sensitive readers, intimations of a Semiticized-Kantianism, for, in the pages of Borges, the congenital subjectivity of space and time seems to make a little room for the Jew. An archetypally rootless figure of isolated consciousness has been squeezed into the ghetto of the manifold (Kant's vision of the inextricable entanglements of perceptual phenomena and the telephone system of New York City). And why not? Traditional circumstances of place are no part of the metaphorical Jew's psychological essence and so he thinks freely, having no other choice, like the mind itself — which, in Borges, is liable to pop up anywhere at any moment, like a Jew.

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Somewhat in this regard, Foucault says Borges inspired him to a laughter out of which flew — brilliantly — *The Order of Things*. I return to concrete universals.

In the story, "Guayaquil," the narrator notices his own pomposity and yet dislikes the same pomposity in his Jewish antagonist, especially when it expresses the narrator's own opinions. If this situation contained merely a self-doubting narrator and a clever Jew, I'd see them as creeps, but Borges suggests one man reflects another whether any man likes it or not; thus we destroy one another, or let ourselves be destroyed, in spasms of suicidal self-hatred. The active horror is stimulated, perhaps, by the fact and the pretentions of Jewish-special-rootless-individuality (upon which the first Jew in the book, an anti-Zionist, actually gloats); and the stimulation is intensified when Jewish cultural assimilation makes ideas of rooted birthright ridiculous, particularly in South America where, unless you're Indian, they are ridiculous to begin with. In "Guayaquil," the second Jew has this effect. Borges's real subject, then, is himself, but he is sensitive to the phenomenology of anti-Semitism and sympathetic to the sensitivities of Jews. Nevertheless, I think that Kafka — the most significant and influential writer of this century — would assure Borges that he, the Jew from Prague, the one who wrote stories, has been ludicrously overrated. Then, if possible, he would drop the subject and cook up his Kiplings.

In the other stories — where it should be noted Jews don't appear — lives are embittered by repressed violence or perverted or ended by knife fights. Two knife stories, to which Borges calls attention in his Preface and Afterword, advance the theme that knives, not people, kill. Our National Rifle Association will now doubt the efficacy of their recent campaign, on TV and a million bumper stickers, arguing that people, not guns, kill. But this is the kind of paradox that Borges enjoys: a conservative artist humanizes a deadly thing; his counterpart in the business world makes humanity that thing, deadly and dehumanized. Borges himself does the latter in a story where two enemies are told to run a race after their throats have been cut. They do so. It is a terrific story, reminiscent of moments in Flannery O'Connor where some quality like personal animus makes fiery efects without destroying the aesthetic object. Terrific, reminiscent of, but not so good as O'Connor. Borges achieves his perfections in a mode less shocking. He thinks so, too.

Most of the foregoing discussion, I'm afraid, comes too close to familiar, serious, complicated facts of modern experience, and it is undermined by Borges — again in the delicate Preface — where he says

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that he is not a "commited writer." I'm not a committed critic, but I don't know precisely what Borges means. He says he doesn't intend to be persuasive, but no artist ever has that as a primary intention. Perhaps Borges thinks the uncertainties of mind, world, and history make it impossible to be a committed writer. Specifically, he says, "someday we will deserve not to have governments." Perhaps, then, human nature itself forbids, both in life and art, and there is no context in which commitment makes reliable, continuous sense. Why then join any party? Or, perhaps, a committed writer — one who is crippled by some narrowing conviction; for example, the idea of a better non-existent world than the one in which, at the moment, we cannot know if we live — loses both his art and his ability to entertain. Borges says, in his stories, he hopes to entertain. In life, he says, he speaks his mind and makes himself a target. This is clear enough in *Doctor Brodie's Report,* which contains stories full of duels and a Preface where modesty and contempt smile together. But Borges's title story, the best and last in the book, derives from Swift — the stupendous genius of imaginative commitments!

Here Borges elaborates an element in the entertaining fourth book of Gulliver. Where Swift uses the Yahoos for a certain argumentative purpose, Borges uses them for another, similar to Swift's, but, I think, more generalized and pessimistic — in a sense, more committed. In Swift the Yahoos are, perhaps, an aspect of Gulliver's *sanity* and part of a rhetorical proposition which accommodates arguments — hateful to Swift — for a society invented by human reason; in the imagined situation, where instinct and the relations of thought and feeling are forever disengaged, the effect is not entirely unappealing. Borges dispenses with implicit argumentative respect for enlightened ideas, and exposes a potential for extreme and hideous degeneration in customs and institutions of civilized human being — rather as if, without Swift's horses, he sits in the conservative camp. Whether he does or not, the story is first rate.

Like the others this story is an exercise in "distance," treating matters far away, imperfectly recorded or recalled, or, when heightened by precise, circumstantial detail, made to seem questionable for just that reason. Such things are unstraightforward; they make for a false, pretentious proximity, as dangerous perhaps as friendship. Nevertheless, Borges supplies them in a quick, clean, direct manner that recalls the splendid abundance of Isaac Singer, another writer much concerned with friendship, especially in his last novel, *Enemies, A Love Story.* In a paragraph these writers can create the solid, various life of a street,

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a city, or an era. But Borges's ambition in this book is only to tell "straightforward stories," even if the artist's hand now and then impulsively answers to the aesthetic requirements of emphasis and form. Modesty is a method of *Doctor Brodie's Report,* and, though his subjects are one or another kind of violence, Borges gives subtlety of tone and a pleasant, civilized voice to his story collection — in effect, all the pleasure of an organized fictional entity. The excellent translation, in which he participated with Thomas di Giovanni, is also an expression of modesty. As Borges implies, the book is not entirely his. It belongs to Kipling, to Swift, to tricks of memory and art, to a sympathetic translator, and perhaps to the failing passions of old age. The last is nonsense, but in such artful qualifications emerges a fascinating edition of the man — not Saint Borges — witty, disturbing, deft in his "straightforward stories."

**Leonard Michaels**

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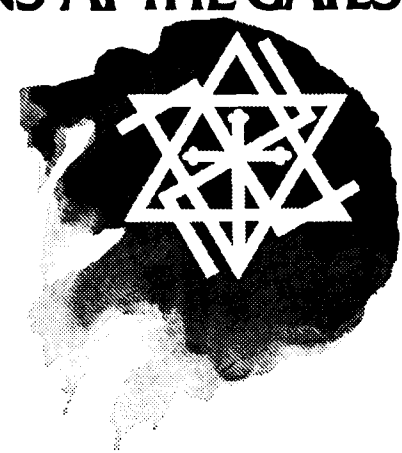

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# ART AND NONART

THE DE-DEFINITION OF ART: Action Art to Pop to Earthworks. 54 illustrations. By Harold Rosenberg. Horizon Press. $10.00.

ACT AND THE ACTOR: Making the Self. By Harold Rosenberg. World Publishing Co. $6.95.

The essays that make up *The De-definition of Art* are models of precision and elegance, insight and generosity. With a brilliance that we have come to expect from Rosenberg, he does not disappoint us as he describes, interprets, explains, and assesses recent art, artists, and some of their critics. Throughout he insists on the integral role of the history of modern art. Neither pop, op, earthworks, action painting, conceptual art, abstract expressionism nor de-aestheticization, antiart, or *Art Povera* is even initially perceptible without a correct sense of previous art. Thus his specific analyses of the artists he discusses, their work and theories, and their critics' theories (often devastated by Rosenberg) converge on the overriding importance of the historical.

That art and the artist derive from previous art is but one theme running through the essays. Another is the de-definition of art. Since this theme is as much conceptual as it is aesthetic and has become a major source of concern in contemporary thinking about the arts, I shall concentrate on it. I shall try to show that it is more a conceptual muddle than a genuine problem.

In *The Tradition of the New* (1959), Rosenberg, in criticizing Langer's aesthetic theory, wrote: "Art is constantly making itself; its definition is in the future. Criticism cannot therefore be a single developing theory; *it must be partisan and polemical in order to join art in asserting what art is to become*" (p. 54; his italics).

This statement, the most programmatic that I have found in his writings, certainly illuminates much of Rosenberg's criticism of modern art, especially his championing of some artists and his castigation of others, although his polemics have engaged other critics as well.

What it does not explain is what he helped create and promote — the anxious object and the de-definition of art; i.e., a future now become present (perhaps omnipresent in the art world) in which art is antiart or no art at all.

It is this deposition of art that he explores in *The De-definition of Art*. Once again, the book is a collection of mostly published essays — a series of forays — rather than a sustained thesis about modern art.

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Whether or not the collection raises the whole question of the de-definition of a book, it does provoke the more interesting question whether there can be a book — a sustained thesis — about modern art? I suspect that Rosenberg strongly believes that there can be no such book because there is no such thing. What there is are modern artists and their art, antiart, or no art; it is only the essay form that can capture this diversity.

Having discovered, if not invented, the anxious object, why should Rosenberg be concerned with the present de-definition of art? Art as an anxious object entails its de-definition. It also mocks at any "definition in the future." But most important, art as an anxious object provides the real clue, which Rosenberg's quotation missed, to the impossibility of an aesthetic theory and of its derived "single developing theory of criticism." For what modern art shows, at least so far as the concept of art is concerned, is that no definition or theory of art is possible. What Dada (or Impressionism, if we follow Rosenberg's beginnings of modern art, p. 86) challenged and what every succeeding modern movement has rejected is the logical (as much as aesthetic) doctrine that the concept of art is governed by a set of definitive criteria. More particularly, each movement in effect has repudiated a putatively necessary property or criterion of art. That art is an open concept, not a closed one amenable to definition and therefore not amenable to re-definition or de-definition either, is the singular conceptual contribution of modern art. In aesthetic terms, the game of modern art has been this: take a property (or feature or element) that someone claims to be indispensable to art — essential in its definition; then make something or, lately, *do* something to show that it is not indispensable to all. To my mind, this game, played according to this one overall rule of rejecting the so-called indispensable, describes the whole history from Dada to Warhol and Clayton. The game is as tedious today as once it was exciting, at least to the logician whose primary interest is in the vagaries of conceptualization, including those surrounding the concept of art.

How new was Dada in its logical message that art is de-definable? Not very. For the history of art — the arts — is the history of de-definition: the run of rejections of putatively necessary and sufficient criteria. So indeed is the history of theories of art. Plato defined art and tragedy. What else is Aristotle's *Poetics* if not a de-definition of Plato's definition? Or — to turn to the history of painting — when, for example, Vasari chastised Pontormo's *Certosa* frescoes, weren't all his specific criticisms directed against Pontormo's implicit de-definition

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of Vasari's definition of painting as *bella maniera*? De-defnition, it seems, is almost as old as definition in the history of art. What, then, is so important about de-definition in modern art?

It is Rosenberg's present contention that the de-definition of art has gone beyond the anxious object ("to think about art in new ways," p. 12) to a conception of the "artist in a pure state . . . where nothing is left of art but the fiction of the artist." This "post-art artist," as he calls him, either rejects art or identifies it with what he makes or does.

Having distinguished between these two forms of modern de-definition, Rosenberg says that the first, with its "experiment [and] constant questioning [led to] much of the best art of our century," as a kind of "visual debate about what art is." The second form of de-definition, however, he claims is incoherent since the artist, as a product of art, cannot be without an object, anxious or not.

It is this theme of the post-art artist that he details in a number of essays in the book. But having argued in the very first pages that such a notion of the artist without his dependence on art is unintelligible, one wonders why he bothers with the details? The reason he does, I think, is that the book is not really about these conceptual problems of art and definition as much as it is a marvelous probing of an assortment of aesthetic and artistic phenomena.

Rosenberg characterizes the present duality of de-definition — art as an anxious object and the deposition of the art object — as "an expression of the profound crisis that has overtaken the arts in our epoch." Profound or not, what is the nature of this crisis? As I understand Rosenberg on this issue, what it boils down to, again so far as the concept of art is concerned, is that the first form of de-definition conceives of art as open in the sense of its perennial flexibility; i.e., that the concept of a work of art must accommodate new works and their new properties (e.g., Duchamp's urinal become fountain). The second form of de-definition also conceives of art as perennially flexible, indeed so flexible as to accommodate anything proclaimed by the artist to be art (e.g., Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*). From the logical point of view, there is absolutely no difference between these two de-definitions, since both buttress their attributions of art by falling back on the presence of an artist as the controlling criterion of the concept of art. However, if all the criteria of the concept are suspect, why not drop the criterion of the artist as well? Then indeed everyone can become an artist. "Set out for Clayton!" — Rosenberg's phrase for this possibility — becomes simply the ultimate (who knows, maybe only the penultimate) consequence of the openness of art, logically prepared for by Dada.

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The issue Rosenberg raises, then, is not between these two forms of de-definition but between what I shall call the "perennial flexibility" and the "perennial debatability" of the concept of art. The artist (or critic) may insist that the concept of art be applicable to new works of art with their new properties, even when traditional properties disappear. But he may go further and argue that the new works of phenomena call into fundamental question all the traditional properties and criteria of art so that the concept of art becomes governed by no unrejectable criterion. Now, this condition of perennial debatability — of challenging and rejecting any or all traditional putatively necessary ingredients of art — along with its corollary that what has been or is called "art" is not art; or that what has been or is called "non-art" is art, is, it seems to me, the real issue in the de-definitional problem that Rosenberg raises. For ours is a period in which for the first time we are asked not merely to render the concept of art flexible but to exploit its flexibility to the limit of rejecting traditional uses of the concept.

Now, if this is the issue, it is easily resolvable because the claim that the concept of art is perennially debatable is a false one about the logical grammar of the concept. At best the claim can serve only as a wanton stipulation as to how to use "art." Interpreted otherwise, it is as incoherent as the view Rosenberg attacks, that there can be the artist without art.

This disagreement over the logical character of the set of criteria for the concept of art — exemplified in both the visual debates about what art is and the verbal debates about what art is and is not — points to another conceptual moment in the "crisis" of modern art. Traditionally theorists of the arts sought the criteria for recognizing and evaluating works of art. Much of the tradition identified these criteria by converting the evaluative into the recognitional, definitive criteria of a true or real work of art. Modern art, through its creation of the anxious object and, now, by its deposition of art, has forced an extension of the criteria of recognition and a consequent radical separation between the two questions: Is it art? Is it good art? Now, since art is an open concept it follows, as the development of modern art shows, that the criteria of recognition for something being a work of art are as open as the road from Dada to Warhol and Clayton.

This concession that anything can be a work of art and that anyone can be an artist exposes in all its nakedness the problem of good art. For once it is allowed that no criterion for calling something a work of art is either necessary or sufficient, so that anything goes, it must still be asked whether it goes well or better than another? Why, for example, is this Jackson Pollock good? That Helen Frankenthaler

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"weak" (p. 64)? This Warhol better than that? This earthwork or this piece of cow dung (exhibited in a student art show in a state agricultural college) better than another one?

It is in the criteria of evaluation, not recognition or in the anxious object or de-definition, that one finds the crisis of modern art. Indeed, the gradual shift from the problem and solution of the criteria of recognition to the problem and as yet no solution of the criteria of evaluation of art has created the real anxiety of modern art. Our worries about the anxious object — because of what Rosenberg has taught us — are over. But our worries about the uncertainties regarding good, bad, and indifferent anxious and de-defined art are just beginning; and here Rosenberg does not help. Nor does anyone else. Rosenberg's anxious object is no longer the uncertain work of art but a certain work of art about which both the spectator and the artist may share in the (perennial) anxiety: Is it any good? And because most of his creations aren't any good, at least the artist's anxiety seems perfectly justified.

*Act and the Actor: Making the Self* is another collection of mostly published essays, brought together to explore "the identity of an actor, individual or collective, sham or genuine, forming itself through acts" (p. xxi). Rosenberg's cast of characters include Marx, the proletariat, Oedipus, Hamlet, Eichmann, Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Dostoyevsky. I found the plot somewhat murky, some of the fictional characters unrecognizable, one of the real characters — Sartre — beautifully dramatizing the theme, and the rest of the characters too recognizable. As one could have anticipated, the best actor of all was the author-producer.

**Morris Weitz**

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# A PRISONER OF WORDS

A THEOLOGICAL POSITION. By Robert Coover. E. P. Dutton & Co. $2.95.

> But be that as it may, between the material operations of the game on the ballfield, and the riotous mythic celebrating of the victory, there are some notable twists, "symbol-wise."
>
> — KENNETH BURKE *on the New York Mets*

The numerous and eminently notable twists, "symbol-wise," in Robert Coover's early fiction are at once the mark of his intelligence as a novelist and a circumscription of his range as a writer. In *The Origin of the Brunists,* which won the Faulkner Prize in 1966, and the subsequent novella, *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968), Coover's sophisticated knowledge of his tradition — his expertise in storytelling and plot-spinning — is strikingly manifest. So, too, is the latent predicament he confronts openly in his most recent work, the four short plays that comprise *A Theological Position.* When the players in Waugh's fictive world, the UBA, come to their ultimate inning, they step forth from the frame tale and criticize, with Burkean ingenuity, their mythic roles, the symbolic nature of the game in which they are played. They emerge, in short, not as realized individuals speaking in the present tense of being (the tense to which Coover moves in the final section) but as characters aware of their characterization, fictional pawns trapped in a text that has failed to give them life. Given the disappearance of Waugh, who has authored them, they become narrators themselves: the fiction as fiction continues. And it is precisely at this point in the *Universal Baseball Association* that Coover's narrative hardens in its formal devices, hardens into allegory, presenting still another (as one critic sententiously puts it) "bleak view of an America which has lost direction and has declined into madness." In "Love Scene," one of the plays in *A Theological Position,* a disembodied directorial voice cries out in pain to his stilted actors: "It's the whole goddam saga of the western world! It's castles of dreams, finding the grail, music of the spheres! There's magic in the air, wizards, love potions, and Satan's ass! Come on! I want transcendence! immortal longings! I want inscrutable forces at work! Now, move it!"

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Indeed the seemingly invincible rhetoric of fiction (Coover studied at the University of Chicago where Wayne Booth is in residence), with all its attendant banality, has become to a large extent Coover's subject. In *Pricksongs & Descants,* his most impressive work to date, there is a brief sketch, "Panel Game," which renders the *praxis* of textual analysis in the terms of a monstrous TV quiz show, a Gothic version of "Truth or Consequences." Called up from the audience, a stunned contestant is thrown cryptic passages and exhorted to find in them nothing less than the meaning ("much ado about nothing"). "You *must* have contrived some concrete conjunctions," the Moderator exclaims at one point, "from the incontrovertible commentary *qua* commentary just so conspicuously constituted." Too late to be spared the consequences, the contestant perceives the essential nonsense. The text found is lost and the sketch slams to a quick close. *Pricksongs* opens with a prologue tale, "The Door." What this door opens upon, however, is not the New World "beyond appearances, beyond randomly perceived events, beyond mere history" that Coover, in a dedicatory preface to Cervantes, argues is the brilliant space the creative imagination discovers. It opens instead upon a pillaged narrative landscape, an Old World of familiar forms strewn with phallic implements and ravished doves, the rubble of designated symbols. It opens upon a woman who cannot extricate her body from her too-tight slacks, upon a magician who can not extricate that same warm body, the body of experience, from his hat, upon Hansel and Gretel struggling through the Black Forest of Pubescence.

Coover, it must be said, regrets this punishment. Unlike Waugh who loses himself in the sporting world of his creation, who is the most responsible of authors, a veritable Balzac, the narrators in *Pricksongs* are intensely aware of their art as artifice, constructions, riddles to which the clues (symbols) are readily apparent. Yet these alienated and complaining writers, Coover maintains, are not entirely to be faulted for their prolix self-consciousness. If they suffer from "overmuch presence" (to use John Barth's term), it is in part because their language has been overtaken by the analysts and critics, its mysteries coldly resolved by a relentless interpretation. In "The Magic Poker" a broken piano is discovered and a random key struck. The sound it makes is "thuck," the exact sound of a literary symbol read anywhere in contemporary fiction. Nonetheless this particular piano sits in a vandalized structure, an abandoned manor (on a *Tempest*-like isle) often visited by wandering delinquents who have scrawled their names on its once–elegant walls, who have in fact shat in the piano's box. Coover repeatedly plays that sour note ("thuck") in *Pricksongs,* striking it most

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heavily in his title which, at one point, he spells out: "death-cunt and prick-songs." Meaning is served up with vengeance. There is no descant above that line, though much discourse in the text. Coover's portentous epigraphs (John Cleland and Paul Valery), for all their promise of some elaborate metaphysical conceit, have finally little to do with the experimental twists of technique and reversals of convention that ensue. Opposites — male/female, mind/body, the writer on one side of his language, the world on the other — are not joined. The title, as Coover construes it, exists as a theorem, a fragmented sentence, not as a piece of wit, and what it states, crudely put, is this: the cunt's death makes possible the prick's song. Coover's manipulative cleverness, the *via media* of the modern writer, is the source and center of a lamentation.

In effect, the venerable romantic metaphors for the poetic process are no longer relevant. Just as the poker has ceased to function as a seminal symbolic wand, the deft touch of which will drop the woman's confining drawers and make copulation possible, writing no longer marries the writer to Nature. "Espouse me," Helen demands in Barth's "Menelaiad," "without more carp!" What Menelaus learns is that he must put an end to his circling discourse, "frig understanding," and simply act, espouse instead of espouse. But the lovers in Coover's fiction typically do not make it. Narrators are unable to break through their rhetoric. At the critical moment the magician loses his magic. Endlessly projecting his image, the metafictive artist works in the hothouse of the masturbatory fantasy where no resolutions are reached, where the word is never incarnate. In "The Magic Poker" the narrator plays incessantly with his symbol — trying, he relates, to die procreatively into the body of his fiction — but is everywhere balked by his awareness of writing as performance, of words as wards, caught in that infinite regress Barth mordantly describes in *Lost in the Funhouse*: "I see I see myself as a halt narrative: first person, tiresome." If Barth's metaphor for the condition of the modern writer is confusion and dismay in the mirrored labyrinth of writing, Coover's is the island, the enclosed self wandering through the space of its isolation, a self that finds in language only the evidence of itself. The island is contrived, the poker "put there."

Yet where Barth in some sense emerges from his maze, surviving his metaphor in the fashion of Borges's Pierre Menard, wresting originality from imitation, Coover has still to make such a move in his art. Where Barth accepts the neoclassical compromise implicit in Borges's work and in effect has been rewriting (in good faith) classical narratives, Coover remains an elegist, a romantic modernist decrying his

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unavoidable betrayal of the tradition he can no longer possess. Although he has written a long essay on the heroism of Beckett ("The Last Quixote," *NAR II,* 1971), it is not Beckett's austerity that is reflected in his subsequent work, but rather the extravagant despair of Melville's Pierre Glendinning, the *young* artist who maims himself (so John Logan has argued) in order to write. Such is the case in Coover's "Beginnings," a story that appeared early last year in *Harpers.* It begins: "In order to get started, he went to live alone on an island and shot himself." In 1972, as in 1852, the consequence of that act is not certain: "This, then, was his problem, beginning. And having begun: avoiding resolutions." Like Pierre, who is assuredly the archetypal self-reflexive writer in American literature, Coover's narrator loses control of his fiction which, even in its multifarious fragments, keeps doubling back upon him. "Beginnings" synopsizes the tales and fables Coover presents in *Pricksongs;* the same ideas occur to this writer, but are here rejected. A figurative Eve, a wife, is used, abused, and left apart. At the end Coover pulls the plug and the island disappears. The writer returns to the issue of his blood on the cabin wall. That is, of course, one form of silence, one way of getting off the island.

With the exception of "The Kid," the plays or "acts," as Coover calls them, in *A Theological Position* re-present the scene of this crisis. The director in "Love Scene" punishes his actors with cliches. A kind of maniacal Lee Strasberg, he is all method, constrained by his preconceptions, yet nonetheless demanding the vivid life of spontaneity, a life his bullied actors cannot give him. Self-consciousness allegorized, he is the voice that brutally represses and finally extinguishes the possibility of love. Like "Rip Awake," the act is a dramatic monologue, an exposition so arch in its ironies that Coover's resort is ultimately to boldface, the scream in large print: "IMAGINATION RULES THE WORLD, SHITHEAD!" Similarly conceived and constructed episodes occur elsewhere in Coover's fiction, notably in *Pricksongs,* but there they have a depth of language, a supple and witty prose not manifest in the plays. "Love Scene" is merely shrill. The Sisyphean Rip in "Rip Awake" lacks distinguished lines, rambles tediously, and then departs. Coover may well have intended these acts to be failed acts, to sound precisely the fatigue of his existential Van Winkle shouldering the absurd, but the rewards of enduring Beckett in his bleak extensions of speech are simply not here. "Rip Awake" fails as a disguised fiction and not within the scope of linguistic and dramaturgical failure metatheater has adopted as its legitimate province. What these experimental plays reveal is a desperation that has become banal, tempered and stressed into the dull track of the complaint.

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The concluding act, "A Theological Position," is appropriately placed. In its Coover recasts and refigures all the major themes and problems that have ruled his writing since the *Universal Baseball Association*. With her swollen and germinating belly, the Woman exists simply as a Nature, a Language, a Force, the Great Womb in which the Word is immaculately conceived. Around her luminous and inexplicable immensity — she smiles Madonna-like, demurely silent — a Man and a Priest anxiously circle, striving to explain and judge the miracle so freely given. The rape of the body by the mind commences. With words, turning himself into his own spectator, the Priest urges himself to climax and in that profanation — fucking but *not-there* — the Woman's cunt is given voice: "I use your language, having failed with my own." It speaks then polemically with the learning and vivacity of Kate Millett. In that lurch into literature a morality play emerges, its ideas shaped from Marcuse and Norman O. Brown and talked forth with feminist *ressentiment*. To stop the cunt's remorseless mouth, the Priest murders the Woman. The intercourse of the imagination with the other, Nature — the Romantic synthesis — is in effect denied. At that point, infallibly, the Pricks begin to speak. It is the prick that has the last word and not surprisingly it indicates that more is to be said anon. Coover's position is thus dourly expressed. Having warred with his narrative mode, metafiction, and then pushed the conflict into allegorical drama, he admits at last his capture. The lamentation breaks off: "After all, there's something to be said for talking cunts. . . . / Yes, there's something to be said. . . ." Coover reverts to his mode. The act begins to discuss its act.

**Neil Schmitz**

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# THE UNREAD ELIOT

T. S. ELIOT'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT 1922–1939. By John D. Margolis. University of Chicago Press.

T. S. ELIOT'S SOCIAL CRITICISM. By Roger Kojecky. Faber. £3.

T. S. ELIOT: A MEMOIR. By Robert Sencourt. Edited by Donald Adamson. Dodd, Mead & Co. $8.95.

ELIOT AND HIS AGE. By Russell Kirk. Random House. $12.50.

THE POUND ERA. By Hugh Kenner. University of California Press. $14.95.

There is no sign at present, at any rate in Great Britain, that T. S. Eliot's fame as a poet is likely to suffer the fate of Abraham Cowley's. It is true that the present generation of poets shows no trace of his influence; but even in his heyday no good poet seems to have been able to assimilate much from Eliot. It is also true that in the literary world in general there is still an intransigent minority — vocal again recently when the original drafts of *The Waste Land* were published — which dismisses his poetry as sterile, over-ingenious, concocted from other people's poetry, and lacking in true inspiration. But these dissenting voices have been heard ever since Eliot's verse became widely known, and I suspect that they always will be; after all, the similar debate on whether Pope was really a poet shows no tendency to die out after more than two centuries. It would appear that, for good or ill, Eliot's poetry is the kind of poetry that provokes that kind of disagreement. But if its repute is still broadly secure, this cannot be said of the rest of Eliot's work — his plays, and his prose writings as a critic of literature and society, and as a man of faith. In 1972 this Eliot is in limbo. It is now current convention to say that his plays, especially the comedies, have become damagingly dated, and to hold that his lifelong quest for a renewal of poetic drama — at least in the form in which he pursued it — was vain. As for his literary criticism, some of which may be the most influential ever written in English, it no longer retains for many readers its old ring of authority; ironically, some of the most effective demolition and disparagement of this part of Eliot's work, and the academic "new" criticism which it inaugurated, came from Eliot himself in his later years. Above all, his writings on culture and education, on which he spent so much time and care, seem to be read only by professional literary students; they are ignored, not only by sociologists, but by the general intellectual public; they have been seen merely

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as the repository of "T. S. Eliot's Ideas," rather than as what they were meant to be: the serious, disinterested, *impersonal* criticisms of contemporary human problems by a devout Christian striving, in a time of chaotic change, to relate the ephemeral to the eternal.

This recession of the prose Eliot into cultural history is very noticeable in the studies by Mr. Margolis and Mr. Kojecky. As a result, they are slightly depressing, though this is hardly the authors' fault. Both books have an air of the academic thesis: we do not learn much of the authors' own point of view, or what attracted them to the subject. But of their kind they are both very good indeed, well written, well arranged, and perspicuous. Mr. Margolis tells the story of Eliot's intellectual development during the twenties and thirties. First we see the young author of *The Sacred Wood,* first and foremost the practitioner focused on the problems of how poetry should be written in his time, rebuking Matthew Arnold, his spiritual ancestor in so many respects, for extraliterary excursions, moralizing, and indifference to technical questions. From this phase we move to the Eliot of the early *Criterion,* preoccupied with "Europe" — which in practice meant the Parisian intellectual world — as a corrective to the provinciality of London; interested in Julien Benda of *Belphégor,* and in T. E. Hulme, first as poet and then as guru; engaged in a disagreement, which was to become lifelong, and at once friendly and acerbic, with the Middleton Murry of the *Adelphi.* We are given lucid guidance through Eliot's attempts to establish a constitutive philosophy for the *Criterion,* more and more influenced by his admiration (always qualified but obviously very real) for Charles Maurras, from whose mistakes — direct involvement in politics, and plans to use the Church without believing in it — Eliot seems to have derived lasting lessons. Thus we are brought to the famous declaration of "classicism," "royalism," and "Anglo-Catholicism" in the preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes.* It seems to have been Eliot's old mentor Irving Babbitt who prompted Eliot to make that declaration, and so we come by a natural transition to the extended debate between Eliot and the disciples of Babbitt and his "Humanism." Then we enter the political thirties, with Eliot's refusal to take either the "red ticket" or the "blue ticket" in the debates of contemporary intellectuals; the growing somberness of his view of modern society; and the estrangement from the leading minds of his time which received its culminating expression in *After Strange Gods.* Mr. Margolis ends with the outbreak of war in 1939 and the end of the *Criterion.* We leave the creative Eliot still absorbed in the ambition, not realized to his satisfaction in *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral,* to restore drama to its ancient religious origins, while the prose thinker was emerging,

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rather wearily, from a decade of immersion in the world of conflicting ideologies and topical polemics.

Mr. Kojecky covers similar ground to Mr. Margolis. But his book is different in that he is concerned to *defend* Eliot rather than merely to clarify and expound him. "Eliot's reputation as a critic of society," he says, "is worse than his record." And after reading Mr. Kojecky's book it would be difficult for any fair-minded person to persist in the crude accusations of irresponsible escapism on the one hand, and political reaction and profascism on the other, which are still often thrown at Eliot. Mr. Kojecky is evidently in sympathy with Eliot's long and lonely efforts to find a middle way between a shallow materialistic utopianism and a despairing renunciation of the world; by overcoming the latter, so obviously appealing as it must have been to one side of Eliot's nature, he sought to achieve that *detachment* which is not to be confused, as it was and is so often by hostile critics, with *indifference*. And on the whole Mr. Kojecky makes a good case for Eliot as something more than a merely negative and pessimistic social thinker. His chief concession to the opposition is to admit that there is sometimes a certain inhuman chilliness about Eliot's detachment. The reasons for this may have lain as much in Eliot's temperament and personal life as in his views considered abstractly. (People who condemn the Eliot of this period as a doleful pomposity should ponder Pound's humane remark, quoted in Mr. Kenner's book: "When a man has had to turn his house for years into a private madhouse . . . that is not conducive to a sense of humor.") But Mr. Kojecky, like Mr. Margolis, exhibits a pleasing tact of abstention here; he does not seek to explore too deeply the twilight region between the Eliot of the prose and the Eliot of the poetry, between the bleak incisive voice of the *Selected Essays* and "the place of solitude where three dreams cross"; still less does either of them speculate on the personal sources of the poetry, the poignant particularities of the relation between "the man who suffers" and "the mind which creates."

The late Robert Sencourt rushes in where Messrs. Kojecky and Margolis fear to tread. His memoir has had a bad press in England, and it must be said that it exhibits a vulgar knowingness — coupled, it would seem, with a virtual absence of real knowledge — which surely would have appalled its ultrafastidious and reticent subject. After looking into Sencourt we can sympathize even more deeply with Eliot's expressed desire that no biography of him should be written. I am reminded of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's comment on a plan to publish Rilke's literary remains: "My idea would be to entrust the hardly explicable phenomenon that once existed here, R.M.R. or H.H., to death, even to oblivion if need be (except in the hearts of a few loyal men

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and women), and leave the works to engage unaided in their hard secret struggle with the next hostile decades." Admirers of T.S.E. might well wish to add his initials to the list. But it must be granted that a biographical shadow is certain to accompany the works into the "hard secret struggle"; it is by now common knowledge that a private anguish underlies *The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ash Wednesday.* . . . Even those who care about poetry rather than gossip, or psychological excavation, will not find it easy to exorcize the haunting presence, behind or between Eliot's lines, of his first wife Vivienne: as I. A. Richards put it, simply and movingly, "She was his muse." All the same, what should not be forgotten is what people like Sencourt, or the reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* of *The Waste Land* manuscripts, seem to have forgotten: that the only thing that matters now is what that presence becomes in Eliot's poetry. The life of Eliot which is now bound to be written will have to show the virtues of sensitive literary criticism as well as human insight and sympathy.

Mr. Russell Kirk's *Eliot and His Age* is unlikely to become the standard literary biography. But it is an interesting and readable survey of Eliot's career, by an American friend of his later years. Mr. Kirk's approach is more informal and personal than academic, but there is nothing gross about it, and he makes good use of quotation from the poet's letters, as do Messrs. Margolis and Kojecky — the three books, if they do nothing else, whet our appetite for a *Collected Letters of T. S. Eliot.* Mr. Kirk is himself the exponent of a form of American conservatism which has quite a lot in common with Eliot's own position; and I found particularly interesting his attempts to relate the poet's political and social ideas to early American sources. It is in this area that Mr. Kirk makes perhaps his most distinctive contribution to the study of Eliot. He also deals extensively, in chronological sequence, with the poems, but I found his explications and paraphrases long-winded and his bluff and breezy manner somewhat incongruous. His book is excessively lengthened by these analyses, and further diluted by a continuous daubed-on commentary on "the march of events" in the England of Eliot's lifetime, which is always rather superficial and sometimes prejudiced and inaccurate. He seems less at home with English politics and affairs generally than Eliot himself was eventually to become, and consequently he is in danger of coarsening and simplifying Eliot's subtler insights. But his book does succeed (though it supplies disappointingly few anecdotes and memorabilia) in presenting us with a warmer and more genial Eliot than the austere figure who dominates the other two.

Mr. Hugh Kenner's large book deals only incidentally with Eliot, but students of Eliot will find useful things in it (though I do not care

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for the playful vignette, which comes toward the end, of the elderly Eliot brooding over cheeses at the Garrick Club). At first glance it looks as if he is throwing down a challenge: making Ezra Pound, rather than Eliot, the chief figure in what once was called "modern poetry," rather than its catalyst man and impresario, which is how he is commonly regarded (except among a small cult-public) in Great Britain. Quite apart from the hostility aroused by his behavior during World War II, Pound has never been generally accepted by the British cultural establishment as a considerable author in his own right, and Mr. Kenner's apparent claim for him might be more provocative over here than in America. But it turns out that Mr. Kenner is not in fact making this claim, and indeed it is not clear precisely what claim he *is* making. He does not go in very much for the traditional function of criticism, the assignment of writers to a comparative order of merit and significance. His attitude to Pound is one of almost complete acceptance; he seems to feel that exposition and explanation are enough to deal (by implication, no doubt) with the familiar adverse criticisms of Pound — formlessness, fragmentariness, sciolism, a truculent crankiness bordering on and sometimes shading into insanity. Mr. Kenner does not exactly deny these charges; nor does he offer an apologia for Pound's sins and follies as a man, but he banishes them to a remote periphery.

The construction and style of Mr. Kenner's book are highly individual. In the main, the work consists of a wide-ranging and roughly chronological survey of Pound's work, designed to display the waxing and waning of the poet's multifarious enthusiasms and obsessions: the cult of "post-Schliemann" Homer; the preoccupation with verse technique, whether in papyrus fragments of Sappho and others, or in Dante and the Provençals; the use of Fenollosa's material and the theories, influencing the poet's practice, about Chinese ideograms; the invention of Imagism (explained by Mr. Kenner as mainly a device to launch "H.D.," whom the young Pound loved) and Pound's abandonment of it to Amy Lowell and other minor figures; his move to a closer association with more congenial minds, the sculptor Gaudier and the unclassifiable Wyndham Lewis, in the Vorticist movement, and its subsequent breakup; his faith, sustained with fanatical intensity, in the doctrines of C. H. Douglas on Credit Reform; the evocative role played in Pound's poetry by certain "Sacred Places" in France and Italy (Mr. Kenner includes some fine photographs of these); the inception and development of the *Cantos;* the later tragic phases of Pound's life, first in the cage at Pisa, and then in the madhouse in America. Discussion of these and other topics to be expected by readers of the *Cantos* is interspersed with flashbacks to the poet's childhood, youth, and early

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associations, together with extensive digressions on the doings of Wyndham Lewis, Joyce, Eliot, William Carlos Williams, and others. In this way Mr. Kenner creates the impression, if not of an "era," as his title proclaims, at least of a loosely connected cultural milieu, with the restless Pound as its storm center. Mr. Kenner's style is equally impregnated with the Poundian atmosphere; learned, allusive, esoteric, with its cryptic ellipses and abrupt transitions, its systematic variations between the colloquial and the academic, or the precious, it is itself strongly reminiscent of the *Cantos* and is likely to attract or madden in much the same proportions as its subject. We all know critics who go more than halfway to meet their authors; Mr. Kenner goes all the way, and even more, for he seems at times almost merged into the headwaters of the poet's thoughts, so that a mere murmur of "mermaids, that carving" is enough to waft him to Venice and Santa Maria dei Miracoli.

Mr. Kenner is Pound's ideal reader, perhaps, but this may entail limitations. He is always lively and often illuminating, with many witty and perceptive observations; if he does not give us the authoritative criticism that we are in need of, he does at least offer much that such a criticism could use (for instance, in his demonstration of the superiority of Pound's "translations" from the Chinese to Arthur Waley's). What I find a little saddening in his book is his readiness to dismiss altogether from consideration the point of view of that hypothetical common reader whom the critic, surely, can never wholly abandon. If Mr. Kenner's approach is the right one, Pound will remain a reader for aficionados only, whereas Eliot's best work seems to have already become part of general culture. But whether this general culture itself has any prospects of survival is another matter; and the prognostications of Eliot's prose writings do as little to encourage optimism about this as does the tragedy of Pound's literary life.

**W. W. Robson**


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## RISK-TAKING

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? By Gilbert Rogin. Random House. $6.95.
BURNING. By Diane Johnson. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $6.95.
THE PROFESSOR'S DAUGHTER. By Piers Paul Read. Lippincott. $6.95

It is fascinating, the risks Rogin takes in this flamboyant book: he has narrowed his focus upon a very few personalities and a very few ideas, he insists upon working down and through and ultimately inside his protagonist, who is a Stereotype locked in a series of boxes of Stereotypes (relationships with Father, with Wife, with Self, with the inevitable Alter-Egos, with the Insanity of Contemporary Life, etc.). Such a deliberate limiting of subject matter could have been disastrous, but Rogin succeeds wonderfully; he may have even written the book to end, forever, the necessity for writing such books. For this reason alone anyone interested in contemporary fiction, from the writer's viewpoint, ought to read this book.

*What Happens Next?* is not a novel, nor is it a collection of stories; it is a long meditative work, poetic and very serious. Because Rogin is also very funny his work is in danger of being underestimated — we do not really believe that one can speak truth with a smiling face, not really. Indeed, the dust jacket of *What Happens Next?* promises us the "comic tribulation of the family Singer" and proceeds to list them, the way an unkind critic might list the bloody events in *Macbeth* or, in fact, the way an unkind critic might list the whimsical events in *What Happens Next?* But the "I"/"he" hero, Julian Singer, protests: "You argue I treat my life too flippantly? No more than death itself is dealt with in my mysteries. My life isn't founded on philosophical ideas but on temperament."

The work is sometimes aggravating, sometimes slowed down in a maddeningly literal way, as when Singer feels he must report to us the various good/bad features of his Florida trip. And perhaps it is too long: for a work that is essentially poetic, lyric, the expression of a temperament, this 260-page length is something of an unnecessary achievement. (When Singer tells his wife proudly that he has not slept with any other woman since meeting her, she asks him at once whether it was because he hadn't wanted to, or was he trying to set a record . . . ? And he doesn't answer.) But most of the time Rogin's writing is poised between the banal "outer" world we have seen before — too often before — and his own sharp, endlessly clever, endlessly questioning appreciation of it. "Is awareness enough?" he asks early in the book: is awareness enough for salvation?

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Julian Singer is a writer and editor, but his real vocation is the constructing of *What Happens Next?* and he uses, perhaps transforms or distorts or betrays, everyone around him. They are always about to become stereotypes — the wisecracking wife, the mysterious father, the precocious stepson, the alcoholic ex-husband, Singer himself ("Antihero," certainly) — and yet they resist categorization, just as Singer resists finally adding them up to anything, fixing them in place, declaring them known. They are given a kind of tentative form by Singer's speculative narrations about them, but the form is never permanent; they can easily be reimagined, glimpsed out a window doing some odd thing and then erased, and reimagined elsewhere. The narrator tries on aspects of personality in an experimental way and, in the course of the book, grows in wisdom, despair, but also in joy. "I fear the purpose of my life is to relate it. Of course, narration gives it form, like one of those puzzles solved by connecting numbered dots. But you would need an almost infinite number. Can I say I lead my life to give me something to say?"

Yes, certainly. Yet this almost modish existential statement is uttered in the context of a man who both is and is not, is never, isolated: he carries around with him, in his head, all his selves, all the people he loves or cannot escape. The only problem with Singer's particular life, his wife tells him, is that no part of it has happened to anyone else.

Working with so much that is familiar, Rogin has accomplished a unique vision and, in what is only his second book, seems to have brought to near perfection his own style. Perhaps the answer to his question — What Happens Next? — will be, for Rogin, an exploration of another kind of fiction altogether.

Diane Johnson's *Burning,* like Rogin's book, takes risks: the most immediate being its setting out to deal with many of the same subjects that Alison Lurie did in her very well received *The Nowhere City.* Like Miss Lurie, Diane Johnson shows us odd behavior in Southern California, seen through the eyes of a fairly bland young couple named Bingo and Barney; there is also a charismatic and eccentric psychiatrist; and the usual props, the vegetation and the swimming pools and the outlandish people. *The Nowhere City* is considered by many people to be the best novel about Los Angeles, if one doesn't take *The Day of the Locust* into account; it is surely a very perceptive, wise, satisfying work. It is very human, believable: in its charting of the almost total metamorphosis of a young New England woman, it means much more to us than West's brilliant novel which is unforgettable but not really moving. *Burning* is both a more superficial and a more serious novel than Alison Lurie's, and what is extraordinary about it is its demonstration of real insight, a real sense of horror — aimless half-comic incomplete

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horror — and yet its consistent reliance upon conventional scenes, conventional use of character and drawn-out dialogue, rather as if two different people had written the novel. One populated it with ghastly possibilities and at least one ghastly reality (a description of two drug addicts injecting heroin); the other constructed each chapter as a kind of lightweight serio-comic episode. The chapters are simply back-to-back and don't contribute toward the characters' development or awareness of themselves so that, by the conclusion — the much-awaited Beverly Hills fire — the reader has grown so tired of both Barney and Bingo (even their names are tiresome!) that their moment of exhausted despair almost passes unnoticed. But it is an excellent one; lying in a motel bed, fearing that their house is going to be burned down, that their lives are somehow also threatened, they embrace each other desperately:

> "Terrible, terrible, terrible. What will we do?"
>
> "Of course it may not be burned down at all."
>
> "It doesn't matter. We have each other."
>
> "Terrible, terrible. What will we do?"

Conscious enough of her material's stereotyped eccentricity that she never takes it seriously, never wastes much time on it, Diane Johnson somehow fails to draw herself and her readers up out of it in order to offer any unstereotyped judgment on it. The novel's people remain subhuman, witless, semimoronic, totally unsympathetic, and yet — yet not really negative, not sufficiently negative to allow us even the dubious satisfaction of feeling that they are being punished in proportion to their sins. And though she can recognize clichés in California life styles, the author does not seem to recognize clichés of narrative technique; sadly, this potentially intelligent novel is reminiscent of a series of related television situation comedy shows, with outlandish zany characters who almost do bad things but never quite succeed . . . and about whom we never worry.

*The Professor's Daughter* will be, I hope, the last novel in our civilization to begin with a quotation from *Democracy in America;* it is certainly going to be the last novel that concludes with this paragraph or anything approaching it:

> Then, in January of 1968, a Senator from Minnesota — Eugene McCarthy — declared that he would stand against the incumbent President in the New Hampshire primary on the issue of the war in Vietnam, and like so many other young Americans at that time, Julius, Louisa, Laura and Danny made up their minds to go north to help him and give the system one final chance.

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It will be distinguished as the only novel in print to allow a secret F.B.I. informer to say, with great effect, to a girl having a "bad trip"; "There's a lot that's good in life. . . . I mean, there's love and having kids and books and music and painting and ideas. I guess we lose those things sometimes, and they get kind of poisoned for us here in the States, but they're there . . . you wait and see."

Where Rogin and Johnson consider stereotypes and stereotyped behavior, wittily, analytically, the young English author Piers Paul Read seems to be writing about them for the first time, almost glorying in them: the generation gap, the Establishment-millionaire-Harvard professor and his cool, slightly alcoholic wife, the daughter who goes to Berkeley and meets only one young man (a "hippie"), the other daughter who embarks upon the obligatory LSD trip and must be rescued . . . and the plotting revolutionaries (the professor's political science seminar at Harvard, which includes a mad Jesuit, the F.B.I. informer, and a bright but emotional Jewish boy) . . . and nymphomania that is the result of a thwarted Electra complex (thwarted? — and if it had been acted out?) . . . but which disappears, abruptly, without a trace, as the novel's plot moves into the college kids' radical plan to kill a minor right-wing politician . . . an obviously doomed plan, but noble in its way, we feel, and it is unfortunate that the professor is killed by the mad Jesuit just as he was coming around to realizing the truths of Consciousness III. . . .

*The Professor's Daughter* begins well, though melodramatically; and then immediately it parades forth its cast of stereotypes, nearly every person, every utterance, every aspect of its plot (again the hotel that has only one room — one bed — and there's no other hotel in town, the hour is late, etc.), and one reads on only out of a sense of despairing fascination. It is not finally important that so contrived a novel should find its way to publication at a reputable house, or even that other novels by this writer have evidently received prizes (in England) — for all I know his American settings completely unhinged his powers of imagination, and he is quite good with English settings; what is important is the ease with which the apparently serious — deadly serious — issues of estrangement, political bankruptcy, the disaffection of youth, can be converted into the most ordinary of narratives, as if the sixties had been finished now for several decades and a hundred novels already written about them. In a sense, *The Professor's Daughter* is every writer's nightmare: you try for *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and its elegant timeliness, its namedropping, its rhetoric, its affirmative ending, but something goes wrong . . . or maybe just a few months pass swiftly . . . and. . . .

**Joyce Carol Oates**

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# OUT FROM UNDER

WOMAN'S ESTATE. By Juliet Mitchell.

I have found it difficult to come to terms with Juliet Mitchell's book, *Woman's Estate,* and I think I know why. It is not only that I am not English, a Marxist, or a Freudian, as she is, and therefore lack her conviction that an economic analysis or even a psychoanalytic one will prove corrective to the social ills of women. For Mitchell believes we must provide a theory, a "scientific socialist analysis," of the oppression of women in order to overcome it. It is also that I am at deep odds with that cast of her mind, that urge to theory which chills me in its constrictions.

It is also a far more difficult book to read than it need be, or ought to be. What it being said is often persuasive, even exciting, yet so clumsily written, so rigid in its rhetoric that it makes me sleepy. Mitchell's self-consciousness when confronting untheoretical material (always marked by a rash of ellipses) makes me distrust her. My hunch is that he need to be taken seriously had deadened her prose. And I might have put her book down had the following conversation not occurred at breakfast.

My husband and I are sitting at a table with our daughter and son, aged five and seven. The children want to go for a sail after breakfast. But we cannot go: I am writing and my husband has begun to paint the house. Who is boss, our son asks? Why can't he decide whether we go or not? Who does he think is boss, my husband asks? He says the father is. Why do you say that? Because the father makes the money, says our daughter. But in our family the mother makes money too, my husband says, and why does it have to be money that decides who is boss? My son replies that otherwise there would be no sailboat — adding quickly that even if men aren't always the boss, they do run the trains. My daughter says why can't girls run trains; why aren't there things only girls can do, if there are things only boys can do. My husband and I say two very different things at once. I say that all people must work at something they can do and do well. My husband says only girls can have babies.

We had been talking as a family about authority and the ability to produce income: a woman's work and not her capacity to reproduce. We had not been defining men as fathers or even as husbands. But suddenly biology became the exclusive or ultimate definition of women. Why is it the limitation of women, in terms of their work, when it is

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not of men — who are surely co-responsible for the creating of the species? And why has the structure and function of the family become an instrument of inequality between the sexes

Marx understood that the position of women was an index to society's advancement, yet he so abstracted woman into a kind of symbol that later in his life when he came to write about the family he managed to do so without mentioning her. It was up to Engels to reduce the problem of women to their physiological weakness, which gave them a lesser work capacity. (Mitchell suggests that it was not exactly "lesser" but another sort of working, equally demanding; it also importantly gave them a lesser opportunity for violence, for they did not bear arms.) He felt that if women were introduced into public industry in great numbers the individual family would no longer be the economic unit of society. But that turned out to be a far too simple and limited explanation. Women in our country now form more than forty percent of the labor force, but we have come cheap. As Shulamith Firestone pointed out, "There is a level of reality that does not stem directly from economics. . . ."

The radical feminists have taken Freud's anatomy *is* destiny and stood it (as well as Papa Freud) on its ear. For if the ability to bear children is the distinction that has led to the oppression of women by men, and if it is admitted to be "a brutal, painful experience" let us revolt against Nature himself. Let us exercise our scientific technology to overcome him. "Embracing the feminist and ecological revolution would mean that cybernation and other technological advances would end all joyless labor; the labor of the factory and of the childbed." There is no more consideration given here to woman in her entirety, her complexity, than Marx or Engels gave her when she was their economic symbol. Now she is someone else's, someone of her own sex who believes in either/or propositions: either joyful labor or the elimination of labor altogether. Such reasoning has a very limited appeal to me, and to be fair to Mitchell she too rejects the proposal, but she rejects it because it is "simplistic materialism"; she wants it buttressed by "historical materialism." What she does not object to is the notion of theory divorced from people, of a vast and stunning range of choices for women reduced to ideology about them.

"Perhaps in the future, the biggest single theoretical battle will have to be that between the liberationists with a socialist analysis, and feminists with a 'radical feminist' analysis. But that future has come too soon. The conflict is premature because neither group has yet developed a 'theory.'" Mitchell further worries that if only the feminist

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aspect of the problem is developed we will forfeit political consciousness and in its place get a kind of chauvinism, "simply a self-directed gaze" — it is worth mentioning that her prediction is very close to Betty Friedan's current criticism of the movement in our own country.

"We should ask the feminist questions, but try to come up with some Marxist answers," Mitchell insists. But why is she so committed to the methods of scientific socialism given the clear discrimination among women experienced in those countries where socialism exists, and which Mitchell herself documents? If socialist ideology is bankrupt, or inadequate, will it not blunt the effectiveness of the emerging feminists? Socialism seems to me no less the invention of men than capitalism is, and neither economic system evolved from the minds of women, as feminism has. Women are working in greater numbers than ever before and in a highly technological society such as ours where sheer muscle power is largely unnecessary. Yet are they any the less oppressed? And if that is true, on what basis are we to assume that woman freed of her reproductive role would be less oppressed? The question before both capitalist and socialist remains: why is she exploited at work as well as in the home? I do not believe that the answer to that question properly involves the sacrifice of her biological self, which I take it to be inextricably bound to her identity as a person. I insist up th prerogative of bearing children as a natoral right; the raising of children — what Mitchell calls their socialization — is something which must and can be shared by both sexes. It can be shared, however, only if the structure of values within any given society is open to change; then, working and employment will alter in such a way as to not only permit that sharing, but make it an essential part of a man's, as well as a woman's, definition of himself. And there's the hitch. For that is not the case in our own time.

Mitchell says that the family ("like woman herself") while appearing to be a natural object is, in fact, a cultural creation. And she sees the bearing of children as well as their raising as a caricature of work in a capitalist society — the child as product. Motherhood becomes a substitute for work, "an activity in which the child is seen as an object created by the mother, in the same way as a commodity is created by a work." ". . . [H]er capacity for maternity *is* a definition of woman. But it is only a physiological definition. Yet so long as it is allowed to remain a substitute for action and creativity, and the home an area of relaxation for men, women will remain confined to the species, to her universal and natural condition." She seems to me guilty of extending the caricature by contributing to it. For unless I

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have misread her, Mitchell does not accept, or even pay lip service to the "creativity" involved within this physiological self. Why is creativity, or even action, limited to thinking, writing, and political theorizing? And to what else are we to be confined, if not to the species? Are we less limited, less confined if we deny or defy our physiological self; or are we limited in yet another way? I suggest that there is something of unalterable value in woman's experience: the very cyclical motion of her body makes her life marked by upheaval, change, and discharge. I am not willing to say that she is made more vulnerable because of it, but that it is instead a source of potential strength; change need not stun her or threaten her, for she is in constant flux. Her interior territory is not only a protective construct, a sort of psychological metaphor of her sex, for it is from within it that she is capable of nourishing and sustaining and conserving life itself. At the very least its presence gives us options men do not possess.

And are these qualities which may be called womanly of any less moment to a society than those Mitchell implies are to take their place? Why is the literary heritage of woman made up of letters and diaries and journals? Are we aware of ourselves and the world around us in any less potent a way than men are, or in another and equally valuable a way? Even gestation is not only the province of the mother, but equally the province of that person who develops (according to Webster) "a plan in the mind." Who conserves more, the historian, the biographer, the teacher, or the mother? Are these therefore inactive, uncreative arts? I am not trying to be poetical about bodily functions; I am suggesting another dimension in which our endowment may be explored.

In the end what Mitchell is after seems modest: the right of women to earn a living wage, the more important right to equal work rather than service jobs which are really only extensions of their family roles. She is not after the abolition of the family. She wants free oral contraception, the abolition of illegitimacy, which will separate marriage from parenthood. Why, she asks, must there be only the mother as "nurse," why "only one institutionalized form of inter-sexual or inter-generational relationship?" She wants a plural range of institutions: "Couples — of the same or of different sexes — living together or not living together, long term unions with or without children, single parents — male or female — bringing up children, children socialized by conventional rather than biological parents, extended kin groups, etc. — all these could be encompassed in a range of institutions which match the free invention and variety of men and women." For Mitchell it is capitalism that has evolved the notion of family that

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does more than occupy women, it produces, conditions, and isolates them. But isn't there already in this country a plural range of relationships, if not of institutions, which are very like the ones she recommends? Single or divorced people, men and women, raising children; people hired to raise or at the least care for young children who are not their own, privately and in day care centers; black children raised by grandmothers rather than by their biological parents; adopted children brought up by married and single people who have chosen them; and perhaps a handful of communes with and without children or marriages? And yet doesn't the question remain this one — under what conditions will men change their working lives, will they risk the convention of their jobs and their hours, or even the very definition of themselves to reshape the families they cocreate, and more often than not coinhabit?

At the end of her lecture at Barnard College this year, I asked Juliet Mitchell what was to be done now. I asked her that from my own position, which is somewhat like the one she envisions for women — I possess an independent and earned income, I am not isolated within the home for I have a profession that I work at — and I am married with young children. Well, she said, in England during the last war there had been communal restaurants and laundries and child-care available to women. They do not exist now, however. And I thought, does it take the conditions of war to provide such services and such social programs to free women? After the war women returned to the home in even greater numbers than before, and they returned to reproduce and not to work. Until the destiny of the family is worked out — economically and in terms of its press upon our psychic identity as women — we will stay within it. *Woman's Estate* does not really give us a way out, it tells us instead why we are there and it urges us to move "Out from Under . . ." the title of her closing chapter. What we need as women, as people, is a more complex exploration of biological motherhood. What we need even more desperately is the re-evaluation of the patriarchal family, capitalist and socialist, which has too often knotted and isolated us within our families, so that it will end with no more damage inflicted upon its women, its children — and even its men.

**Nancy Milford**

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# VARIETY

## MANSON COUNTRY

> Nobody knew that the deserts of the West, the arid empty wild blind deserts, were producing again a new breed of men. — NORMAN MAILER, *An American Dream* (1965)

"Hi. I'm Charlie Manson," he's supposed to have said when they found him hiding in the bathroom cupboard up above Death Valley. It took two more months, some so-so police work, and quite a lot of luck to find out who Charlie Manson really was, or at least enough of it to see that he was a significant figure in the violent decade that brought him his vocation. But his significance is easier felt than defined; his career and style point toward some aspects of modern America that are more difficult to come to terms with than poor crazed Manson himself.

Anyone who knows the West even casually will hear in that "Hi" a familiar, conventional yet not insincere cordiality that aims, I suppose, at making the most of the loneliness of being alive in the midst of monumental emptiness. The style was of course southern and midwestern first, but it seems to make more sense in the gas stations and roadside cafes of the far west, where the imagination of remoteness is aided so poignantly by the eye, by seeing so much of the space that isolates you. In that landscape you almost have to say "Hi" (or "Howdy," or "How,"), since any human contact, even with cops, is somehow welcome there, because somehow surprising and stimulating; and the conventional sign at the other end of the encounter, "Come back, now," almost means the anxiety it affects. But the style conceals even as it expresses — in that space seclusion feels normal and right, nature itself seems to forbid too much curiosity about what other people are really up to. And since western space also permits continual movement without having to explain yourself and doesn't seem noticeably diminished by the introduction of a few dead and mutilated bodies here and there, it was a fine landscape for Manson and his friends.

There's something familiar in this nightmare, then, something that temptingly gestures toward larger feelings about American style in a difficult time. The rather surprising paucity of writing about Manson — Ed Sanders's *The Family*[1] is the only ambitious consideration of him I'm aware of — suggests a general assumption that his meaning is only too obvious to anyone of tolerable sense and virtue. What can the hippie life, with its pointed inversions of decency and law, lead to if not degeneracy, madness, and such ultimate horror as group-murder for kicks? Or if, like Ed Sanders, you take a more pastoral view of the countercultural impulse, you can read Manson elegiacally, as sad evidence of what went wrong with the beautiful dream of an alternative *communitas* somewhere Out There. Sanders's implicit theme is carried by broad but unproven hints that Mansonism was not a self-generated corruption but a contamination from outside, through Manson's supposed connections with existing, establishment-fostered evil: organized crime, movieland

1. *The Family: The Story of Charles Manson's Dune Buggy Assault Battalion.* By Ed Sanders. E. P. Dutton. $6.95.

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drugs-and-porn networks, a lurid underground of occultists and demonists who (for example) practice human sacrifice on remote California beaches, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, and most of the unsolved murders in Greater Los Angeles between 1967 and 1969. In a world like ours, that is, no Eden is secure.

Once this sort of game gets going, of course, reason and the rules of evidence must stand aside:

> It is possible that the Process [a British-based cult of alleged Satanists] had a baleful influence on Sirhan Sirhan since Sirhan is known, in the spring of '68, to have frequented clubs in Hollywood in the same turf as the Process was proselytizing. Sirhan was very involved in occult pursuits. He has talked several times subsequent to Robert Kennedy's death about an occult group in London which he knew about and which he really wanted to go to London to see.
>
> There was one Process member named Lloyd who was working as a chef for one of the larger Los Angeles hotels, either the Ambassador or the Sheraton. . . . It is probably a coincidence that Sirhan seems to have visited a friend who worked in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel the day before he shot Senator Kennedy.

Sanders deserves the abuse he's received for this sort of thing, and it wasn't surprising to hear recently that he and his publishers have had to retract many of the book's allegations about the Process. And certainly such woolgathering doesn't help serious thinking about Manson: if he is more than a loathsome figure of burgherly moral allegory, he's also more than a pawn in some pop-Gothic extravaganza of universal conspiracy against the light. Sanders's Manson is as far from where we live as is the Manson of middle-American tongue clucking.

Yet an unselective and messy approach to Manson has its virtues. If Sanders's theories are mostly hopeless, his material is rich and suggestive, allowing one to see that if Manson's story doesn't "mean" much of anything it nevertheless may *express* quite a lot. For Sanders, Manson was a kind of radio set picking up what was in the air in a strange time, and if this notion is useless to the lawyer or the psychiatrist, we may yet need a magpie's taste for the extraneous detail, the rationally absurd analogy, to get Manson into some kind of focus.

Certainly, with Sanders, we do well to ignore what the psychohistorian would want to begin with, the usual stuff about childhood and adolescence. The Manson who matters isn't a case history but a cultural artifact, a man whose life was accidentally blessed, or rather cursed, with an opportunity to escape his personal history and begin again as someone he'd had no reason to hope he could be. In 1960 he entered prison, not for the first time, as a car thief, pimp, and petty forger, one of those sleazy tinhorns from Appalachia or the Great Plains who drifted to California in droves in the forties and fifties; in 1967, with his old impulses and skills sophisticated by prison studies in hypnotism, scientology, guitar playing, and Robert Heinlein novels, he emerged into a world he himself might have made to be his ideal theater if he'd had the wit, one whose style and outlook had during his absence become a slicker if less authentic version of his own. In Berkeley and the Haight and up and down the

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coast kids were talking and dressing and acting like him. While the creatures of this brave new world had drugs to teach him (on his first acid trip he apparently experienced his own crucifixion, but then so did others), he could offer them not only a fantastic psychic and sexual magnetism but also the old lag's expertise in how to get what you want without actually paying for it.

He had of course missed the theoretical point of their case, the passive rejection of family, society, political and military horror that was meant to be implicit in their enactments of love, brotherhood, psychic transcendence, the simple life. He simply wanted to make it big in show-biz as a rock musician and songwriter, and when that failed, he was content for a while to use his weirdo charisma to make himself interesting to some rather alarming Hollywood fringe-types, camping at their houses, using their cars and credit cards, letting them take filthy movies of himself and his girls around their pools. Manson was really a fear-freak, as Sanders suggests; his thing was power, not love or even pleasure, certainly not justice or revolution, but his style was hard to distinguish from that of thousands of others whose intentions were better or at least more confused. Even the police, who saw a lot of him even in those days, took him for just another hippie, or, at worst, an oddly small and scrawny specimen of the bike-gangers he sometimes consorted with.

By the time of the Tate–La Bianca murders and those less publicized ones the Family also committed, Manson had of course gone beyond his profitable exploitation of foolish or decadent swingers. Historical accident had released him from his original self, but Manson Redivivus was generating its own new history, which must have been getting to feel as marginal and frustrated and unfree as the old one. Only at this point does violence become an overt motif in the Manson story. None of his earlier difficulties with the law seem to have involved physical viciousness; he was more grifter than hood, described by a police psychiatrist in 1959 as "not [giving] the impression of being a mean individual" and by his parole officer a year later as "this weak, tricky youth." Yet the Manson of 1967–69 grew increasingly obsessed by at least the style of violence, putting on terrific shows of temper within his group and working out the elaborate mystique of torture and killing that led to all the murders.

From the Beatles' White Album he derived his obsession with "Helter-Skelter," a vision of impending social apocalypse through a revolution of the blacks; he formulated elaborate plans of escape in dune buggies across the Mojave to Death Valley, where he and his people would hide out until the blacks were ready to hand over the world to him. The murders seem to have been, in part, exercises in loyalty and nerve for his followers — Manson himself apparently wasn't present at the Tate–La Bianca killings, much less an active participant. And here there's an intriguing parallel. Though Sanders estimates that Manson, who disdained contraception like any sexist male, copulated some 3,000 times during the two and a half years of the major phase, only once did he get anyone pregnant. It seems to have worried him — happiness isn't a warm gun if it isn't loaded.

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Whether collective and calculated or individual and impulsive, violence, I suppose, is an effort to escape a history that's felt as intolerable. In rejecting reason, argument, law, the structures of responsibility and affection that otherwise urge a withholding of force from others, the violent man destroys his socialized self and strikes out into an unknown territory that feels exhilaratingly like freedom, at least until he gets there and begins (perhaps) to be ashamed or apprehensive. For Manson, I imagine, the mystique of violence was in effect a mode of self-recreation. Twice-born through cultural accident but aware that his second life was petering out, he may dimly have sensed that through violence yet another new self might come to be. Murder offered at least the illusion of power, in the form of an anonymous publicity to make up for the publicity of the rock star he'd failed to achieve. And it would objectify adequately the awe and fear his followers, psychic cripples and unfinished adolescents as they were, needed so badly to invest in someone.

At this point, or maybe well before it, we do better to turn away from Manson himself. If his career makes an appalling kind of psychological and political sense, it remains a trivial and, in its own terms, uninstructive one. But as his story leads away from him and toward the world we must after all share with him, his effort to make myth of his own life, by living out a style adequate to the terms of America in the sixties, has considerable interest.

One is struck, first of all, by how easy it was for him to live. Where good citizens have to worry about money and practical arrangements, the acquisitive society, with its necessary devotion to waste, virtually thrusts its excess benefits upon shiftless but shifty nonproducers like Charlie Manson. Where to spend a night, or several weeks? — the Los Angeles basin is full of comfortable or luxurious domiciles whose owners think nothing of being crashed by a dozen or two homeless creeps. (If they tire of you, they don't call the cops but move out themselves, as some of Manson's hosts and hostesses did.) People who lack cash-money usually have credit cards, even the waifs and runaways who clustered around Manson, and, apparently with the thought that a lost child isn't really lost if the bills keep coming in, their parents often paid up indefinitely. You can always steal a car, obviously, but if like Manson you hobnob with prosperous yet Bohemian creative people like the Beach Boys, there are apt to be sports cars, jeeps, Rolls-Royces or whatever available for long-term loans. (The owner may however have to go out to Death Valley and pay some repair bills when he wants his wheels back.) Legitimate money can always be picked up hustling rich women, selling a little dope, or turning out some of your girls around the Sunset Strip; but the proceeds can be reserved for important capital expenditures like guns and bail bonds, since there are garbage cans full of slightly-worn produce to be had behind any of the better supermarkets. And of course, unlike the ordinary burgher, for whom travel is an event that requires money, planning, and anxiety, you can go anywhere anytime and stay as long as you like.

If you have drugs and sex and a distinctive philosophy of life to of-

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fer, that is, you will find America today as hospitable as Manson did. And when, as occasionally will happen, someone finds your fatal charm resistible and calls the cops, he will find that as a police state the U.S. is an awful flop. Before and after the murders Manson was continually being arrested for narcotics offenses, fraud, traffic violations, auto theft, statutory rape, and so on; yet the charges were always dropped, even though he was on parole from a federal prison. He was finally connected with the Tate–La Bianca affair only because an eleven-year-old boy found a gun in his backyard and reminded the police about it months later, when they'd completely forgotten about it. Off the pigs indeed!

But if Manson's story doesn't quite jibe with the old Cagney films where your iron-eyed parole officer followed you around hoping you'd spit on the sidewalk, still the movies loom large in the Manson story. One can't of course live in Southern California at all without feeling Hollywood as an essential part of the ambiance. It's just *there,* and too much shouldn't be made of the appearance of Will Rogers State Park and Leo Carillo Beach in the Manson *mise-en-scène*. But as accumulated by Ed Sanders's fan-mag curiosity, meaningless movie lore begins to seem a necessary dimension of the story. Manson came out of prison with a contact at Universal Studios, hoping to promote it into a career in recording and maybe even films; when he began, *à la* Ken Kesey, to transport his people around in an old school bus, they posed as a traveling movie crew, on the reasonable assumption that people will accept any kind of behavior if it has to do with Hollywood. Robert Beausoleil, his most effective male associate and the first of the group to be charged with murder, was at least nominally a professional actor, who had worked in Kenneth Anger films and skin-flicks. Various children of Hollywood personages had at least marginal contact with the family, and the house in which Sharon Tate and her friends were killed had been visited by Manson before, while it was occupied by Doris Day's son, whom Manson apparently knew fairly well. (Jay Sebring, one of the victims, himself lived in Jean Harlow's old place.) The Spahn Ranch, the family's Los Angeles headquarters, was an old-time movie location (once owned by William S. Hart) which was still used occasionally for low-budget Westerns, beaver films, and Marlboro Country commercials. The family itself was hooked on making home movies, pornographic and otherwise, and Sanders says that they took a stolen NBC-TV camera along to record their last retreat to Death Valley, where, at a godforsaken distance from any paved road or permanent habitation, they made their headquarters a mile or so from an abandoned mine owned by (who else?) Warner Brothers.

Publicity, the expedient narcissism that makes Hollywood go, was Manson's medium of self-imagination long before the case broke and he turned up so sensationally on *our* home screens. If he thought himself divine, Manson Son of Man, it was in the person of Jesus Christ, Superstar; if he was the devil, he played it with the lurid flourishes of a zonked-out stage Mephisto. Or ("Hi. I'm Charlie Manson") he could be just plain Gary Cooper, with the easy grace of the simple man with something in reserve. All of Manson's roles

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in fact derive from us, from cultural materials we created and happily consumed long before there was a Manson to act out their worst possibilities. Movieland was the right arena for him, remembering that Movieland isn't just posh poolside Beverly Hills and groovy Malibu beach pads but also the strange and empty moon–landscape all around, that caricature of American space that needs filling with *something,* if only with celluloid dreams of Lawrence's "essential American soul," the hard, integral, unsocial, and yet magnetic Deerslayer, the "isolate, almost selfless, stoic enduring man, who lives by death, by killing, but is pure white."

In Lawrence's terms, obviously, Manson represents that soul in disintegration even more clearly than do some other possible contemporary instances. With the style of the counterculture as cover, from both the law and some of his more naive followers, he was yet an essentially conventional and undisruptive type, feeling out the weak spots in our social fabric not to expose and destroy but to creep inside and get his share. He reminds us, if we need reminding, that crime may not represent resistance to an established order but an expression of its own values *in extremis.* Just how, subjectively, exploitative aggression turns into suicidal destructive madness is as mysterious at the personal level as at the public and political, but Manson and Calley have some representational value in common, and beyond them stand Johnson and McNamara, Nixon and Kissinger, and most of the rest of us.

At any rate, Manson's final flight to the Mojave was mythically right. The desert is both the quintessence of American space, with its promise of freedom, and also the terrible end of that promise, littered with worn-out cars, refrigerators, aircraft, and general junk, already tinged with the L. A. smog from 200 miles away. (It looks rather like Vietnam, that is to say, or the Apollo landing sites, where all that useless equipment sits forever. Would Aldrin and Armstrong have been quite so stirring if the moon weren't so evidently a John Wayne set?) The desert's few people, outside the SAC bases and ordinance proving–grounds, are mainly prospectors and miners, still hopefully seeking the big bonanza of gold, silver, or tungsten, the "Grand Glory Hole" that was somehow missed in the prosperous days when the ghost towns were lively and the mines productive. (Manson's mad search for "The Hole" of Hopi legend, the hidden entrance to an underworld of bliss and security somewhere beneath Death Valley, is a curious and touching parallel.) The desert is a junk heap, a graveyard for nature and technology wedded in mutual death. It was the right place for Charlie Manson, whose dreadful story may yet reflect a bewildered desire saner and better people, here and now, may also feel.

The California Supreme Court abolished the death penalty in time to spare him and his poor, dumb, stupefied girls, and that seems all right. We can't rid ourself of what he signifies by killing him. But like others who have seen and felt more than they can understand, he may well want to die, and if by any chance the chair in the gas chamber at San Quentin faces eastward, it would have made some sense to think of him sitting there, like Deerslayer, at the end.

**Thomas R. Edwards**

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## CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

SAIGON, VIETNAM (AP) — An order issued by Maj. Paul M. Boseman, operations officer of the 377th Security Police squadron at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, says in part:

"Salute when you recognize an officer even though you both, officer and noncommissioned officer, are nude."

An Air Force spokesman said this was "intended to emphasize the importance of saluting officers when recognized, whether in or out of uniform."

He said he did not know under what circumstances officers and enlisted personnel might encounter each other in the nude.
(*The Chicago Tribune,* December 12, 1972.) Contributed by Larry Retzack, Evanston, Illinois.

"Regardless of how much South Africa may need expertise and skills, I will not allow in any person who admits to being an atheist. Tolerance and mutual respect are basic needs if people of different societies are to live in harmony." Dr. Piet Koornhof, South African Minister of Immigration.
(*The Jerusalem Post,* September 21, 1972.) Contributed by Mrs. B. G. Cohen, Savyn, Israel.

Dr. Christian N. Barnard, the pioneer surgeon of heart transplanting, was in Tel Aviv to help raise money for disabled children. Discussing the nine transplants he has done, Dr. Barnard said two of the patients had survived. "But we helped the others a lot, even though they died," the surgeon said.
(*The New York Times,* November 11, 1972.) Contributed by M. Rybak, Brooklyn, New York.

At Boston University, where Miss Gillespie's disappearance has added to the shock of the deaths earlier this fall of Kathleen Ann Randall and Debra Rae Stevens, administrative officials are conducting an intense but informal anti-hitchhiking and personal safety campaign. Student leaders point to enthusiastic response — about seven hundred showed up at a planning meeting — as a renewed sense of community on campus.

One dormitory resident said, "It's bringing people together where things like politics and the Vietnam War never could."
(*The New York Times,* December 10, 1972.) Contributed by Sarah Jane Williams, Greencastle, Indiana.

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*FREDERICK BUSCH*

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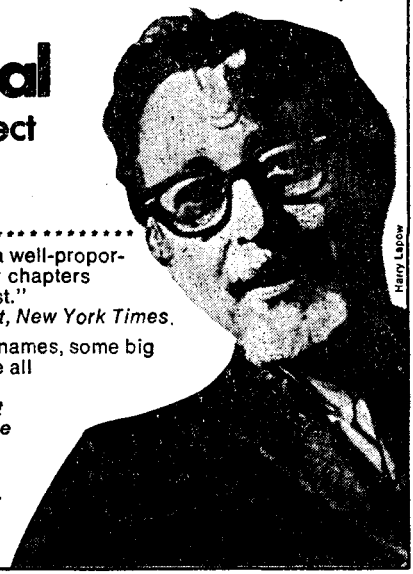


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